

ASGARD

D20 SYSTEM MAGAZINE
ISSUE 1 JULY 2001

EXCLUSIVE FICTION SET IN
THE WORLD OF
DAEMONFORGE

ORIGINAL MONSTERS
FROM THE CREATORS OF
THE CREATURE CATALOG

MEET ERIC NOAH
WE TALK TO THE MAN WITH
THE SITE

THE PRESTIGE OF MAGIC
INTRODUCING THE HIGH
SORCEROR

rites of passage

A FREE ADVENTURE FROM
MIDGARD MAGAZINE

PLUS

MIXED BLOOD - HYBRIDS IN D&D
THE BLIND ASSASSIN PRESTIGE CLASS
WORLDS APART - A LOOK AT THE
WORLD OF FAHLA
STORYCRAFT - SPIKE UP YOUR GAME
SLAYER SENSE - BRING A LITTLE
BUFFY INTO YOUR LIFE
ASK THE ORACLE - IS THE SAGE NOT
ENOUGH?
AND MUCH MORE!

The Big Launch!

Welcome to the first issue of *Asgard* - the d20 System Magazine brought to you by EN World. As Project Leader of EN World, this is my first venture into the world of online publishing.

Asgard isn't perfect, but this is a learning process. I don't promise to get everything right, but I do promise that I will do my very best to make this magazine a magazine that you want. You can email me with your comments, suggestions and monetary gifts at [morisus@lineone.net](mailto:morrisus@lineone.net).

As has been previously mentioned on various websites, this magazine is the sister magazine to *Midgard*: The d20 Adventure Magazine.

Midgard is also hosted at EN World, and we hope, with these two publications, to bring you a winning formula demonstrated over the last few years by Wizards of the Coast's own *Dragon* and *Dungeon* magazines.

We have several regular columnists writing for *Asgard*, but we welcome your articles and contributions. You can email me at the above email address with your proposal, and I will let you know whether or not we are interested as soon as I can. Unfortunately, much as we'd like to, we can't accept everything - but if you'd like to see your name in lights give me a shout!

One thing that we are short of is artists.

There are, sadly, far fewer talented artists out there than there are talented writers. If you are an artist, and would like to contribute to our efforts, please let us know. As this is a free publication, we can't pay you - but your work may lead to future, paid work with EN World as we expand to publish sourcebooks and other products.



There. That's got the introductory preamble out of the way and allows me to move on to the topic I really want to talk about: the EN World d20 System Awards, colloquially known as 'the ENnies'. This annual ceremony, hosted by EN World in association with Eric Noah's Unofficial D&D 3rd Edition News, allow you, the gaming public, to give something back to the talented writers, artists, designers and

publishers who have worked so hard to create the products that you use every week in your D&D games. I strongly encourage you to vote when the time comes for the d20 products of your choice.



Voting will also have another desirable effect. It is a direct way in which we, the d20 fan community, tell the publishers what we want. By winning an award, a publisher will know that what they have done is right - and other publishers will take note.

And the last reason - it will be fun. On July 29th, you are invited to join us for the online award-giving ceremony. The awards will be presented by Gary Gygax, one of the founders of the game we all love. Let's make this event the *only* award ceremony that matters!

For more information, take a look at EN World. You know where that is, because you downloaded this magazine from there - but in case you've forgotten, EN World can be found at www.d20reviews.com.

Until next month,

Russell Morrissey
Editor

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THE Usual Suspects



In this column, I intend to take a brief look at the d20 industry each month. I'll report on rumours, new products and any other interesting little bits and pieces that I come

across. There are a number of products that have caught my eye – I've just scored a copy of Green Ronin's *Legions of Hell*, which is previewed later in this issue of *Asgard*. This has to be one of the best products yet. The first two of Mongoose Publishing's *Slayer's Guides*, *Hobgoblins* and *Gnolls* should well be on sale in America by the time you read this, and the third book, *The Slayer's Guide to Centaurs* will follow soon after. Mongoose seem determined to make a name for themselves by doing things that other publishers aren't – most notably by not producing adventures!

Looking a little further ahead, though, there are some very exciting things on the horizon. Rumour has it that Green Ronin will follow up *Legions of Hell* with a similar book dealing with critters from the Abyss; of course, before that we should see *Hell in Freeport*, an adventure which supposedly combines the Freeport setting introduced in their first three adventures with the nasty denizens presented in *Legions of Hell*. Hmm... sounds interesting. Mongoose Publishing have a few interesting products up their sleeve also. The *Arcane Lore* series will commence with *Demonology* rapidly followed up with *Necromancy*. As they say "We intend to make demonology dangerous and necromancy downright spooky." Each, essentially, is a book that delves into the class in question, presenting prestige classes, feats, and lots of descriptive information.

Ernie and Luke Gyga, the sons of the 'Father of D&D', have been brought in by Troll Lord Games to pen a series of adventures. The first adventure in the series, *The Lost City of Gaxmoor*, is targeted for a September release. Luke Gyga stated, "We designed *The Lost City of Gaxmoor* with one objective in mind, a return to good old-fashioned adventuring. *Gaxmoor* is the right mixture of action and problem solving in a unique environment. I believe that it will provide hours of enjoyment for both hardened veteran gamers and novices alike. And as a DM, I have enjoyed running both of my gaming groups through the city." Talking of Gygas, it appears that Ernie and Luke's dad, the illustrious Gary Gyga, has also been conscripted by the Troll Lord gang to write a series of sourcebooks. Tentatively titled *The Canting Crew*, the first book in the series is the definitive guide to the underworld in a fantasy, quasi-medieval city. The book will be valuable to players and DMs alike. It will contain rules and ideas that players can incorporate into their roguish characters, including prestige classes, feats, skills, equipment, and a comprehensive guide to

cant and signing. DMs will discover invaluable source material regarding the criminal underclass, and details on a fantasy city populated by them.

Thrilling Tales is a quarterly magazine of fiction in the pulp genre, written by some of the top names in the pulp, comics and RPG fields. In addition, each issue will feature the D20 Pulp rules, and write-ups of the characters and situations presented in that issue's stories. The first issue ships in July. A couple of books from Eden Studios have also caught my eye. The first, *Fields of Blood* is a large-scale war rulebook for D&D; we are assured that the rules take into account the prolific use of magic on the fantasy battlefield. The other book, *Taverns*, presents a collection of generic taverns for use in your game. If this is done, well, I think that it will prove very useful indeed.

Jagged Edge Games is about to release the second sourcebook in the free *Umbragia* series. *Umbragia: Religion & Sorcery* has been delayed due to extensive rewrites, but is apparently almost ready to go. The *Umbragia* setting from Jagged Edge is a free setting - just head on over the website and download the 100+ page pdf file that is the *Umbragia: Core Rulebook*. *Religion & Sorcery* looks to be of a similar size.

Talking of electronic products, Wyverns Claw Design are definitely worth a look. They are breaking the mould somewhat by producing adventures geared solely for a single player and DM. Perfect for those without a large gaming group.

In Brief

Sell Out Ink's *'What's That Smell?'* is set for a July release. There's not a lot of information around about this one, but I'm curious to see what John Wick has come up with for the d20 System. Other notable releases expected over the next month or so are Privateer Press' *The Sleeping Legion* (part III of the *Witchfire Trilogy*), *Creature Collection II* from Sword and Sorcery, *Traps and Treachery* from Fantasy Flight Games and *Deadlands d20* (I'm very interested in seeing how this one pans out).

As a final note, EN World itself is moving into the publishing industry with a few interesting books on the horizon. Titles have not yet been decided, but we are negotiating with writers to produce a book on magic (including various 'themes' for your world's magic), a monster book and a toolbox book of locations, maps and NPCs. We'll let you know more as soon as we can.



Asgard Recommends

At EN World, the host of *Asgard Magazine*, you are the people that review and score the d20 products. It is you who decide which products make it into the 'Best of the Best' and the 'Worst of the Worst' boxes. Each month, we will summarise the contents of those boxes for you so that you can see which products truly are the gems. To earn an EN World recommendation, a product must have scored *higher* than 4.25 at the time we go to press.

Campaign Settings



The Living Greyhawk Gazetteer
Wizards of the Coast
Score: 4.83

The Living Greyhawk Gazetteer is your passport to the Living world of Greyhawk.

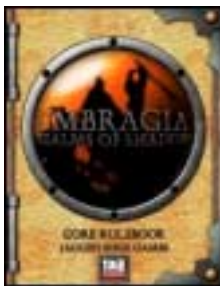
Specifically designed for global participation among members of the RPGA (Role-playing Gamers Association), the *Living Greyhawk Gazetteer* is a shared-world campaign. The changes that occur during the game change the face of Greyhawk as events unfold among players across the world. Players who join the RPGA can continue to follow and impact changes to the Greyhawk world through the RPGA Network magazine and website.



Forgotten Realms Campaign Setting
Wizards of the Coast
Score: 4.57

Welcome to Faerûn, a land of high magic, terrifying monsters, ancient ruins and hidden wonders. The *Forgotten*

Realms Campaign Setting presents the most comprehensive fantasy world ever described!



Umbragia: Realms of Shadow (Core Rulebook)
Jagged Edge Games
Score: 4.50

UMBRAGIA: Realms of Shadow (formerly the *Shadowlands*) is a new and original game world

for the d20/D&D system. The core book contains 19 new races and a dozen nations set in the backdrop of a history that spans several thousand years. Included in the book are: full details on all 19 races; a snapshot history of

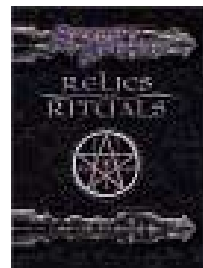
the realms; an overview of all of the nations and major areas of Umbragia; a map; a new Magic System ready to use; a sampler of creatures and magic items; a glossary of terms unique to the realms. Also – it's free – download it from www.d20reviews.com.

Accessories

The Book of Eldritch Might
Malhavoc Press
Score: 4.75

The Book of Eldritch Might is a d20 sourcebook for all things arcane. Here's what you get for your five bucks: nine original feats, three new prestige classes, more than 60 new spells of all levels, a like number of magic items of all types, from weapons to wondrous items (and artefacts!) and a new monster template, the magical construct, which allows any spellcaster to create golemlike guardians and servants based on existing monsters.

Relics & Rituals
Sword & Sorcery Studios
Score: 4.31



What wondrous blade is this? What strange incantation is captured on that scroll? Ready to outfit your 3rd edition campaign with a host of new magic items and divine and arcane spells? From trinkets to artefacts, from curious cantrips to devastating rituals, *Relics & Rituals* has something new for every fantasy role-playing gamer and campaign!

Adventures

The Standing Stone
Wizards of the Coast
Score: 5.00



The 4th adventure in a new era of Dungeons & Dragons®. This is the 4th adventure in a series of 8-strategically designed to hit the "highlights" of the D&D rules and move characters from the 1st to the 20th level. Deep in the forest, evil

awaits. A ghostly horseman is terrorising a small hamlet, and the player characters must stop him before he kills everyone. Players deal with supernatural horror as well as traditional monsters in this powerful adventure. This is the only adventure to score a perfect 5.00 points consistently across the board.



Thievery 101: Joining the Watchers
Wyvern's Claw Design
Score: 4.67

The first instalment of the *Thievery 101* series. It's a solo module meant to allow a 1st level Rogue entrance to a Thieves Guild and is perfect as a side-trek adventure for any low level campaign involving a rogue. Available in electronic format from Wyvern's Claw Design's website.



The Spear of the Lohgin
Paradigm Concepts
Score: 4.67

An ancient curse threatens the land of Milandir as a callous madman awakens an evil long left undisturbed. The populace of a once-proud bastion of honourable knights rises from death to oppose the force that struck them down. The players are thrust into a drama involving the lands of both the living and the dead, as they seek to fulfil a prophecy and stop an unspeakable horror from being unleashed upon the innocents of the world. Can they stop a malefic intelligence that once consumed ten times their number?

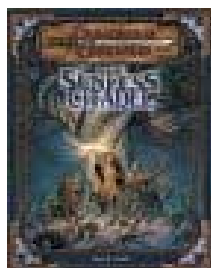
The Longest Night
Privateer Press
Score: 4.50

The first offering from Privateer Press is the *Witchfire Trilogy* series of adventures. Part I, *The Longest Night*, is a 64 page adventure which will plunge first-level PCs into the middle of a perilous witchcraft scandal. Full of intrigue, investigation and classic dungeon crawl action, this scenario has something for everyone.



The Sunless Citadel
Wizards of the Coast
Score: 4.33

A once-proud fortress fell beneath the earth in an age long past. Renamed the *Sunless Citadel*, its broken halls are home to nefarious races and malign creatures. This is the first of eight adventures strategically designed to highlight the new Third Edition Dungeons & Dragons rules.



The EN World d20 Reviews Page

The d20 Reviews page at EN World is there for your use. You are the ones who provide the reviews and rate the products. If you have recently purchased a d20 product, make sure that you post a review so that others may benefit from your experience. Just remember – next time, it might be you thanking the assorted reviewers for pointing out a superb product or for helping you to avoid spending your hard earned cash on a turkey.

EN World also holds regular review competitions with great prizes.

EN World can be found at
www.d20reviews.com

EN World is the official host of the d20 System Awards Ceremony (The ENnies) in association with Eric Noah's Unofficial D&D 3rd Edition News.





Keep Going

Chapter One

A novel set in Daemonforge by Ryan Nock

The flames of the Skaukator Furnace passed below as the airship neared its dock. Sant Kerrel watched respectfully as his friend leaned over the railing to shout a prayer down to her family's resting place, the dull wind from the overcast sky muting her words for his ears. He could guess her words, though. He and Kendra had that much in common at least; both of them had lost their families. The demons had killed Kendra's family in one of their raids nearly a decade earlier, and Sant Kerrel's parents had died in a burglary. Like all members of the Soul Guard, they shared the bond of mutual loss.

As the airship winged around another mountain peak, sending the furnace fires out of view, Sant Kerrel silently prayed that his parents had found in the fires the oblivion that was denied in the godless world of Daemonforge. His parents had preferred to have their souls destroyed, rather than having to wait eternally in the empty hope that the Gates of Heaven and Hell might open again.

watching her out of the corner of his eye as he surveyed the mountain peak outpost. One of several in this range of the Fingers of Darkness, the outpost overlooked the Twilight March, the seemingly endless line of departed souls that trekked to their final resting place in the Necropolis of Skaukator. Five years ago Sant Kerrel had made that trek himself, escorting the specters of his parents to the fires, the only true end that existed anymore.

The outpost was sparsely manned, as usual, and the only movement Sant Kerrel saw consisted of the dockworkers pulling the airship toward the balcony railing. Over a dozen men of mixed races hauled the lines toward the stone-carved balcony dock, all wary of the hundreds foot drop from the balcony to the steep mountain cliffs. The captain of the ship called to his crew and the dock men in a mixture of gnomish, dwarvish, and human tongues as he guided their work to drag the thirty-foot long ship to abut the stone pier. With the ship's sails furled out of the strong mountain winds, muscle power alone drew the vessel toward the small fort town.



The airship crew pulled the scout skiff slowly into its dock, gnomish air pilots with heads that barely reached Sant Kerrel's waist scuttling across the deck to adjust rigging, cover vents of blue iron, and secure the ship's cargo for the inevitable rough impact of an aerial docking. Used to the commotion, Sant Kerrel smiled to Kendra and waved her over,

A few dozen buildings, consisting mostly of barracks and storehouses, spotted the sloping surface upon which the town was built. Like all the forts built in the peaks of the Fingers of Darkness, this one was expected to defend against possible fiendish attacks from across the Mist, but its most regular purpose was to assure the safety of those travelling the

Twilight March. Sant Kerrel smiled in respect for the soldiers who defended the grieving loved-ones of the travelling dead. From this high, the Path of Spirits appeared to be an unbroken, palely glowing road through the mountain pass below.



"Kerrel," Kendra called, her footsteps pounding quickly across the wooden deck as she came up beside him. She stood nearly as tall as Sant Kerrel, but even covered with seventy pounds of red iron plate armor she was less than half as massive. An eager smile on her brown-skinned face, she ran a hand through her dark braided hair, brushing away the sweat beaded on her forehead. "How long are we going to be docked? Any chance for shore-leave?"

Sant Kerrel gave a short laugh, the sound emerging as a snort from his wide orcish nostrils. Eyeing the trail of the dead far below, he shook his head. "I don't think it's likely, Kendra. I've got a feeling."

Kendra hummed in disapproval. "You get those far too often, Kerrel. They always make you gloomy for days. So what is it this time?" Sant Kerrel shrugged, his own plate armor clanking softly. "This time it's an itching in my nose, like I smell something awful. Almost makes me want to stick my finger in and pull it out."

Kendra curled her nose in distaste, and Sant Kerrel chuckled, grinning tusks. Not content to simply frustrate her, he began to unlatch his gauntlet. "Yeah, this dumb armor gets in the way whenever I try to."

Kendra slapped him on the back, shaking her head with a weak laugh. "People like you are the reason orcs have a bad image, Kerrel. Hey, do you think the captain would consider telling us what the big hush is about?"

Sant Kerrel again shrugged, leaning his back on the railing comfortably, unconcerned with the deadly drop if he lost his balance. "The crew say that he got his orders directly from General Tarasdor last night. I'm sure we'll find out pretty soon. Maybe we'll be lucky and get shore leave after. . . ."

He realized Kendra had stopped listening to him, and was staring toward the balcony, where a brief commotion was brewing. Turning his own golden eyes to the docks, Sant Kerrel tried to figure out what he was seeing. Though they had been docked less than a minute, the crew had already secured the gangplank and was in the process of hauling a huge steel cage back to the ship. A familiar upbeat tune filled the air, played on a flute by a dancing woman dressed in frilly gray clothes of various shades. Though the small crowd of workers obscured the occupant of the cage, Sant Kerrel slowly placed the music the odd woman was playing.

"What poor taste," he muttered, nudging Kendra in the side. "That's a funeral dirge she's playing. On a flute. Whoever she is, she has horrible decorum."

The giddy smile on Kendra's dark lips perturbed him. She smirked and nodded. "Of course she does. I think it's hilarious. Can you tell who it is?"

Sant Kerrel frowned. "Which one? The piper or the prisoner?"

Kendra waved off her friend's dour mood with a light hand gesture. "The 'piper' is Bountiful Shades-of-Gray, one of those Bugaboo folks. I've heard about her since I was a little girl, though I guess you probably wouldn't know of her where you're from. No, who or what is in that cage? Has to be dangerous if they need us to guard it, whatever it is."

Scratching the tip of his left tusk, Sant Kerrel shook his head. "He can't possibly be more dangerous than that woman. You're sure she's one of Bugaboo's helpers? They're a bunch of loons believing in a false god."

Kendra grinned at him. "Kerrel, you're afraid of one of Bugaboo's helpers?"

He grumbled, "They're annoying, and they know it."

Kendra's voice carried mockery. "Just because you've studied the ancient gods, you think any new gods have to be as dour and serious as they are. I'd wager that when you were a boy you loved the Bugaboo as much as everyone else."

Sant Kerrel firmed his thick jaw and silently walked toward the gangplank to get a better view. He heard Kendra's footsteps follow him a moment later, but he tried to ignore her. His mother had believed she had been the offspring of Sant Kerrel's grandfather and a celestial messenger. She had never accepted that the ancient gods were truly gone, and thus had forbidden Sant Kerrel to believe in the childish superstition of the Bugaboo. He imagined he had been the only child ever to denounce one of Bugaboo's helpers as a false prophet. An embarrassed red tint coming to his gray skin, he hoped his friends had forgiven him for ruining that birthday party.



He reached the railing beside the gangplank just as the crew finished hauling the ten-foot cubic cage to the edge of the pier. Still piping, the Bugaboo lady smirked at him from beside the small cell. Waiting impatiently to get a look at the prisoner, Sant Kerrel tried to squelch his frustration. He sighed when the crowd finally parted for a moment, revealing its occupant. At first it just appeared to be a normal man dressed in torn clothing, his skin a sun-burnt red, but something about his demeanor set Sant Kerrel ill at ease. The prisoner had obviously been beaten, and he bore a mixture of cuts and bruises across his small frame.

Sant Kerrel started to turn away and dismiss their newest cargo as a simple brigand when the man brushed his short black hair out of his eyes and stared chillingly through the bars of the cage, meeting his gaze. The man's eyes gleamed a fiendish red as he smiled and stood defiantly. From his back flexed a wide pair of leathery wings, their flesh a pale crimson the color of a scab. Sant Kerrel shivered as the fiendblood looked at him, and he nearly stumbled backward into Kendra in his uneasy desire to avoid the demon. Kendra gave a startled angry shout at the demon, and he moved quickly to restrain his friend before she

tried to take revenge for the death of her family.

Kendra grimaced, then called to the captain, a mixed blood elf-gnome. "Captain, what's this?"

Sant Kerrel moved to hold Kendra's arm behind her back, and was ready to cup his hand over her mouth if she tried to speak any wizardly incantations to attack the prisoner. The captain, a foot shorter than either of them, let his first mate finish the process of dragging the fiendblood's cage aboard. As he walked up to Kendra and Sant Kerrel, a small crowd of other soldiers formed at a distance.

"This is a demon," the captain started, his deep voice tinged with sarcasm. "A demon in a cage. So none of you have to worry that he might hurt you. Kerrel, ease up on that grip before you break the woman's arm."

Sant Kerrel loosened his grip, and Kendra struggled free. "As long as he's executed soon, I won't have a problem."

The captain smiled, adjusting his coat. "Our dear guest here is a deserter from the fiend armies across the Mist. We're not sure how he managed to fly a hundred miles over the Mist, but General Tarasdor wants him brought to Skaukator for interrogation. We're just to ferry him to the Chapel, where members of the Pale Guard will take him off our hands for his final trip to Higher Skaukator. In less than two hours he'll be off my ship, but until then I don't want anyone's personal vendettas endangering what could be a source of valuable information. If any of you make any trouble over this, I'll have you tossed overboard."

"Now get back to your posts. Four of you will be taking turns watching the prisoner. We're leaving immediately, because I want to get rid of this trash tonight so he won't ruin my day tomorrow. Kerrel, your friend Miss Bleuth has first watch. You take second watch, as soon as you escort our other guest to her quarters." Frowning, Sant Kerrel wondered for a moment before he realized who the captain was talking about. The piping had just stopped when he felt a tap on the back of his head. Pasting a smile onto his face, he turned to see, as he expected, the Bugaboo woman.

She smiled widely, exposing the dozens of wrinkles on her aged face. Her gray hair billowed like a cloud of smoke down to her shoulders, and her light gray eyes twinkled mischievously, as though she were six instead of sixty. With her flute tucked away into the folds of her elaborately ruffled gray dress, she almost looked the part of a noblewoman instead of a deluded follower of a mythical children's god.

"You're a sad little child," she said, her voice surprisingly old and cracked, "but I love your taste in colors. Is that your natural skin color, or is it dyed?"

Feeling the eyes of the rest of the crew on him, Sant Kerrel cleared his throat uneasily. "I'm celestialblood, miss. I guess you get gray when you mix Orc green and celestial white."

"Well as long as you don't have any orange in there. I hate orange, young child. My name's Bountiful Shades-of-Gray, but I believe I haven't had the pleasure of yours."

"Um . . . Sant Kerrel Pound. You'll be traveling with us?"

Nodding and smiling, Bountiful raised her voice. "Did you like my piping? The first song is free, but any further dirges I play for you, you have to pay in advance."

The captain walked forward and patted Sant Kerrel's arm. "Don't worry, soldier. She won't be here long. It'll be good for morale, I hope. Plus anyone that cheerful is certain to be a nuisance to our prisoner. Oh, and try to make sure there's nothing orange in her room. The dock master said she caused a violent incident a few days ago when. . . . Well, you can imagine what happened. Give her the room next to the kitchen."

Kendra cleared her throat to get the captain's attention. "Sure, wouldn't it be better if I escorted Miss Shades-of-Gray and Kerrel guarded the prisoner?"

Bountiful smiled like a kindly grandmother, shaking her head. "Play nice, young lady. You can talk to Auntie Bountiful once you finish your chores."

Kendra chuckled, but Sant Kerrel simply tensed his jaw and forced himself not to make any crass comments. Only the disturbing presence of the fiend kept him from laughing at his own plight.



Half an hour later, after the ship had left dock and after Sant Kerrel had made the Bugaboo woman comfortable in her quarters, he returned above deck to take his shift after Kendra. Overhead the sky was a murky gray, and to all sides of the ship he could see the Mist below, a swirling mixture of black, brown, and purple vapors deadly to anyone who breathed them. The airship rode only a few dozen feet above the highest banks of Mist, some of which reached high enough to blanket the lower peaks of the Fingers of Darkness. The Mist kept the fiendish armies out of the mortal realms, but also kept the mortals from striking back at their enemies.

He stood silently, pondering the banks of Mist that the ship sped by on its way to Skaukator, the city of the dead. Though it had been over a thousand years since any spirits had passed to Heaven or Hell, few of the dead wished to find an eternal end. The Pale Lord, master of Skaukator and the master to whom Sant Kerrel ultimately answered, offered oblivion to those who desired it, and comfortable rest to those who did not. The raised road of the Twilight March had been built above the Mist to provide passage to those mortals seeking to pay homage to their ancestors, and those spirits who wished to come to rest in the sleeping city. The airship flew parallel to the March, traveling west in the same direction as the souls on pilgrimage to Skaukator.

Even from this far out, perhaps fifty miles, Sant Kerrel could make out the city of Skaukator atop one of the widest plateaus in the mountain range, but the city he saw was home mostly to only a few thousand mortals. The true extent of the city descended into the rock of the mountain, and some villages of the dead stretched along the slopes hid beneath the Mist. It had been an option for his mother and father to continue their existence after death in the underground Mausoleums, or in

the Mist-blanketed lower city, where any living mortal would be twisted or driven mad. Millions of dead souls lingered in Skaukator, living an unlife exotic and unseen to most mortals.

Ultimately, Sant Kerrel could not decide if he preferred his mother's choice. She had wanted an end, rather than having to wait in a world without the Heaven she hoped to serve. In the fires of Skaukator's Furnace, powerful magicks created by the Pale Lord's followers tore asunder the souls of those who could stand no more of the world they had been born into.

Kendra's calling voice pulled him from his thoughts. "You here to relieve me yet, Kerrel? I've had to endure a half-hour of conversation with that evil fiend."

Sant Kerrel nodded slowly, striding quickly toward where Kendra sat on the deck beside cage. The sun was setting beneath the Mist, and its last beams gleamed dimly on Kendra's armor. She extended a hand for him to help her up, which he did gladly.

"Did he give you any trouble?"

Kendra chuckled. "Of course he did. We had a tiny bit of an argument."

The fiendblood was leaning his back against the bars of the cage, his wings slightly unfurled. He had a sneer on his face, and in fact his voice seemed to sneer as well. "So, bringing out the ship's brute to pummel me some more?"

Kendra rubbed her chin, then shook her head. "Chance, if you don't give Kerrel here a hard time, I promise he won't beat you up."

Sant Kerrel blinked in curiosity. "Your name's Chance? That doesn't sound very fiendish. I bet all the other fiends beat you up when you were a kid."

Chance made an obscene gesture in reply, then said to Kendra, "Get me some food, woman. I'm starving in here."

Kendra laughed, once. "Just because I have orders not to kill you doesn't mean I have to be nice to you. Kerrel, be careful around this guy. He admitted to killing two of the guards at the outpost."

"I was defending myself," Chance hissed, scratching his ear with one of the claws on his wing. "And I'll 'defend myself' again if the Orc here gets any ideas about that warhammer of his."

Sant Kerrel widened his golden eyes in surprise. "The fiendblood's got worse manners than you, Kendra. Does he have any magic around him?"

Kendra, who had started to walk away, stopped suddenly and frowned, humming. "I can't really tell. The natural fiendblood in him makes it hard to tell if he can use any other magic. You should be careful, just in case. I'll be in my quarters preparing some spells if he tries to make a break for it."

Waving Kendra off, Sant Kerrel sighed and settled onto the deck near the cage. He sat there quietly for a few minutes before Chance began tapping on the steel bars, trying to get his attention.

"What do you want, fiendblood?"

Chance reached an arm through the bars, trying to tap Sant Kerrel on the shoulder. Seeing that the man's fingers ended with short black claws, Sant Kerrel moved slightly farther

away. Chance grumbled and pulled his arm back in.

"Are you going to feed me?"

"I'm not a cook," Sant Kerrel replied.

"Bastard," was the last thing the fiendblood said before another soldier arrived to take the next shift.



Less than an hour later, the captain called the crew to deck as the ship neared the Chapel, a small city that was the last way station before Skaukator itself. Few mortals traveled beyond the Chapel, usually only honored guests or elite members of the Pale Lord's Wraithguard. Sant Kerrel himself had never traveled further west into the Mists than the Chapel, and as the airship docked for its second time in one day, he wondered if he ever would actually stand in Skaukator itself, or even more remotely, perhaps actually cross the Mist and fight the fiends. Praying to ancient gods whose names few remembered, Sant Kerrel watched the Wraithguard drag the prisoner out of his cage long enough to clean it before they carted him onto another ship bound for Skaukator itself. He hoped that the fiendblood actually had no useful information. If an invasion did occur, he did not doubt that many of his friends would die for no good purpose.

The Wraithguard quickly and efficiently loaded Chance onto another, more ornately designed airship. In less than five minutes they shoved off from the airdock and swept about to finish the journey to Skaukator. Like a ghost itself, the ship slipped away silently, ominously, the only movement apparent to it being a trio of griffon-mounted scouts.

A few of the crew congratulated the captain on a fine job, and then word spread that the mess hall had prepared a small feast in honor of what might be the first step to renewing the fight against the fiends. As the crew and soldiers made their way below decks, Sant Kerrel noticed Kendra staring at him expectantly. He realized he had must have been looking uncomfortable, so he quickly adopted a more stoic face and smiled back to her, hoping to avert her worry. Only a few minutes later, Kendra was smiling and laughing with the rest of the crew, enjoying a meal of particularly tasty gruel.

After eating a modest amount of food and mingling with a modest number of people, Sant Kerrel made sure the captain wouldn't be needing him for the rest of the night, and then he headed above deck in hopes that the clouds might clear and give him a view of the stars. The ship would be moored at the Chapel only until the morning, so shore leave was not an option, but he could at least relax under the stars.

The sky was overcast still, however, and Sant Kerrel decided not to tarry too long on the exposed decks. Sometimes storms that washed through the Mist would rain bizarre magicks instead of water, a danger which became more prevalent the further west one traveled. He was about to head below deck again when he spotted an aerial shape in the distance, coming from the direction the Wraithguard's airship had headed. As the

figure neared, he made out the shape of a person riding a griffon, a strange sight to see alone. Flying by griffonback without a ship to rest on was exceedingly dangerous in the event the mount grew tired.

Sant Kerrel rushed below deck, gritting his teeth in annoyance at the sound of the Bugaboo woman piping to entertain the crew. He quickly found the captain and pulled him aside.

"Sir, I think one of the riders from the Wraithguard's ship is returning. He seems to be headed this way."

The captain pondered for a brief moment, then gestured for Sant Kerrel to lead the way back above deck. By the time they again reached the main deck, the griffon and its rider were just alighting on the ship's prow. The griffon shook its aquiline head like a cat and released a loud screech, then sagged onto the deck from exhaustion. Its rider crawled off his mount's back and ran toward them, shouting as he approached.

"Are you the captain? I need this ship to leave immediately."

Sant Kerrel stepped aside to give the captain room as he replied, "For what reason?"

The griffon rider removed his helmet, revealing him to be of mixed gnome and dwarf blood. Brushing aside his hair, he straightened and saluted the captain. "Sir, the *Pale Hand*, the ship that just left here with the prisoner-. The crew is dead. The prisoner released some kind of poison. Everyone he didn't kill seems to be under some sort of enchantment."

"Gods," Sant Kerrel muttered. "The fiend is going to steal the airship, but then why didn't he kill all of us and take *this* airship?"

"Kerrel," the captain said quickly, "roust the crew. We're sailing in two minutes. The celebration's a bit premature."

Sant Kerrel nodded, glancing to the west briefly before rushing below deck, wondering if the fiend had already escaped.

Chapter 2 next month!



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Blind Assassin of Ka'Ragorr

*A D&D Prestige Class by Russell
Morrissey and Dylan Gault*

The young woman made her way cautiously down the street, tapping the ground before her with her stick. Nearby people gasped at her blank, white eyes, for she had no pupils, no irises. A young child rushed out and guided her around a hole in the road, and she smiled and murmured her thanks, continuing tentatively along her path.

The Order of the Assassins of Ka'Ragorr is ancient indeed. The history books refer to the Order as a devoted to assassination and, and they are not far wrong.

The Order is a secret sect, devoted to teaching its unique art. It does not seek fame, prestige, money or power. Only rarely does the of the blind assassins work for the outside world. Its 'clients' are few - demons, powerful necromancers, and wealthy and vengeful clerics. Those who require the services of the order are required to make a sacrifice - in exchange for the life that the Order will out, the client must provide another for the order to test and train.

Although the blind assassins are trained deep in the stronghold of Ka'Ragorr, rumours hint that a secret pocket of this daemonic cult has found a foothold in the Kessel region.

Most of these 'candidates' (mainly young children) do not survive the tests that they are put through; and more still do not survive the harsh blinding ritual which makes their full training possible, but those that live gain the power to see into the future. Blind they may be, but their vision has an unnatural clarity.

Through their meditation and training, the blind assassins develop the ability to see an instant into the future. In combat, a blind assassin knows what her opponent is about to do a brief moment into the future. The effect of this foresight gives the assassin the appearance of lightning reflexes of a order.

If a blind assassin has one greatest weakness, it is that she cannot use her foresight to influence her own future, because to do so would create a paradox. If she knew that her next step would plunge her into a deep hole, and that knowledge kept her from taking the step, the future would change and her vision would have been different. The greatest hurdle for the training of a blind assassin is to ignore prescience when it applies to oneself. Those who cannot maintain this control soon go mad from the mental paradox. Because a blind assassin is rigorously trained to ignore visions of her own future, she is as prone to accident and misfortune as any other blind person.

Most blind assassins are trained first as monks; others begin their career as fighters or warriors.

Hit Die: d8.

Requirements

To qualify to be a blind assassin, a character must fulfil all the following criteria.

Alignment: Lawful Neutral or Lawful.

Base Attack: +5.

Concentration: 4 ranks.

Balance: 8 ranks.

Listen: 10 ranks.

Feats: Blindfight, Combat Reflexes, Improved Unarmed Strike.

Special: Must be accepted into the Order of the blind assassins. During the ritual that completes membership, the character is permanently blinded. Only the spells *wish* or *miracle* allow the character to regain her sight.

Class Skills

The blind assassin's class skills (and the key ability for each skill) are Balance (Dex), Concentration (Con), Craft (Int), Intuit Direction (Wis), Jump (Str), Knowledge (Arcana) (Int), Listen (Wis), Move Silently (Dex), Profession (Wis), Sense Motive (Wis), and Tumble (Dex).

Skill Points at Each Level: 4 + Int Modifier.

Table: The Blind Assassin of Ka'Ragorr

Lvl	BAB	Fort	Ref	Will	AC	Special
1	+0	+2	+2	+2	+0	Blindness, Sneak Attack +1d6, Timesight
2	+1	+3	+3	+3	+1	Deflect Arrows, Prophetic Sight, Uncanny Temporal Dodge (Dex bonus to AC)
3	+1	+3	+3	+3	+1	Prophetic Evasion, Sneak Attack +2d6
4	+2	+4	+4	+4	+2	Improved Prophetic Sight
5	+2	+4	+4	+4	+2	Improved Prophetic Evasion, Sneak Attack +3d6, Uncanny Temporal Dodge (can't be flanked)

Class Features

All of the following are class features of the blind assassin prestige class.

Weapon and Armour Proficiency: Blind assassins are proficient with all simple weapons, plus the throwing axe, handaxe, sap, short sword, light flail, rapier, scimitar, glaive, halberd, ranseur, scythe, kama, nunchaku, and siangham. Blind assassins gain no proficiency in any armour or shields. Note that armour check penalties for armour heavier than leather apply to the skills Balance, Climb, Escape Artist, Hide, Jump, Move Silently, Pick Pocket, and Tumble.

A blind assassin adds her Wisdom bonus (if any) to AC, in addition to her normal Dexterity modifier, and her AC improves as she gains levels. (Only add this extra AC bonus if the total of the blind assassin's Wisdom modifier and the number in the "AC Bonus" column is a

positive number.) The Wisdom bonus and the AC bonus represent a preternatural awareness of danger, and a blind assassin does not lose either even in situations when he or she loses her Dexterity modifier due to being unprepared, ambushed, stunned, and so on. (Blind assassins do lose these AC bonuses when immobilised.) If the blind assassin has levels of monk, her class levels in blind assassin stack with those monk levels to determine the overall AC bonus from the table on page 38 of the Player's Handbook.

When wearing armour, a blind assassin loses her AC bonus for Wisdom and her AC bonus for class and level. Furthermore, her supernatural abilities all face the arcane spell failure chance that the armour type normally imposes.



Blindness: Before an initiate can complete her training as a blind assassin, she must undergo a painful blinding ritual. This blinding better allows the blind assassin to follow the guidance of her supernatural prescience without being distracted by her own present. Though the blind assassin's Timesight ability (see below) mediates many of the problems of being blind, if ever the Timesight is negated (such as while within an *antimagic field*); the blind assassin suffers all the normal penalties of blindness. In addition to the obvious effects, a blinded creature suffers a 50% miss chance in combat (all opponents have full concealment), loses any Dexterity bonus to AC, grants a +2 bonus to attackers' attack rolls (they are effectively invisible), moves at half speed, and suffers a -4 penalty on most Strength- and Dexterity-based skills.

A normal *cure blindness* spell or even *heal* is insufficient to undo the ritual of blinding. Only a *wish* or *miracle* spell can restore the blind assassin's sight.

Timesight (Su): The blind assassin gains the Timesight ability; this is similar to the Blindsight ability as per the description on page 73 of the Dungeon Master's Guide, but does not apply to immobile creatures or objects. The ability is a prerequisite for all other class features, and thus no other feature will apply in situations where the Timesight does not apply. If for any reason, the blind assassin regains her natural sight, she loses the Timesight ability until she again undergoes the ritual of blinding.

This ability extends in a 10' radius per level of the blind assassin. Immobile creatures and objects cannot be detected with this ability. Because of this drawback, the blind assassin is still considered blind when dealing with things immobile. Though she can attack and defend moving opponents without penalty, she would still have trouble balancing on a beam or aiming for a stationary target.

A being under the influence of the *nondetection* spell is also protected from this detection unless the blind assassin succeeds at a caster level check against the spell's caster as per the rules on page 232 of the Players Handbook. The blind assassin's class level takes the place of caster level for this check.

Though Timesight can easily be thwarted by an *antimagic field*, it is possible to defeat the blind assassin's Timesight in a more mundane manner. A creature that takes the Refocus action and remains completely still for at least one round can immediately thereafter make one partial action before the blind assassin can detect his presence. For that one partial action, the blind assassin gains no benefit from her Timesight-derived abilities. While standing perfectly still to accomplish this tactic, a character must choose to automatically fail all Reflex saves. Additionally, by standing motionless he has an effective Dexterity of 0 for determining bonuses to his armour class.

Though Timesight has a limited range and cannot perceive attackers outside its scope, it can perceive approaching attacks, such as arrows and *lightning bolts*, and allows the blind assassin to defend against them normally.

Sneak Attack: The blind assassin knows much about how blindness can equate weakness. She has the ability to make sneak attacks with the same requirements and limitations as those of a rogue. Her sneak attacks deal +1d6 points of damage. This extra damage increases to +2d6 at 3rd level and +3d6 at 5th level. However, a blind assassin cannot make a ranged sneak attack beyond the range of her Timesight, or beyond 30 feet, whichever is less.

If a blind assassin gets a sneak attack bonus from another source (such as rogue levels), the bonuses to damage stack.

Deflect Arrows: At 2nd level, a blind assassin gains the Deflect Arrows feat, even if she doesn't have the prerequisite Dexterity score. Note, however, that the blind assassin can only deflect attacks she is aware of, so if her Timesight is overcome (either via antimagic or by surprising her by attacking after standing still a moment), this feat becomes temporarily useless.

Prophetic Sight (Su): At 2nd level, the blind assassin gains the ability to use her Timesight to perceive the very near future of her opponents, granting the assassin knowledge of how to most effectively anticipate her opponents' attacks and weaknesses. This requires focus, and so the bonus applies to only one foe at a time. Each round, as a free action, the blind assassin chooses one opponent to defend against with this ability. Against all attacks made by that foe, the blind assassin gains a +2 insight bonus to AC. She likewise gains a +2 insight bonus to Reflex saves caused by the actions of that opponent (including spells the opponent might cast). Finally, the blind assassin gains a +2 insight bonus to attack rolls against that opponent.

Uncanny Temporal Dodge (Su): Starting at 2nd level, the blind assassin gains the ability to react to danger before his senses would normally allow him to even be aware of it. She retains her Dexterity bonus to AC (if any) regardless of being caught flat-footed or struck by an invisible attacker. (She still loses her Dexterity bonus to AC if immobilised.)



At 5th level, the blind assassin can no longer be flanked, since she can react to opponents on opposite sides of her as easily as she can react to a single attacker. This defence denies rogues the ability to use flank attacks to sneak attack the blind assassin. The exception to this defence is that a rogue at least four levels higher than the blind assassin can flank her (and thus sneak attack her).

Unlike the normal Uncanny Dodge, the blind assassin's Uncanny Temporal Dodge ability depends on the usage of Timesight. The two abilities are different. If the blind assassin has another class that grants the uncanny dodge ability, *do not* add together the class levels to determine the character's uncanny dodge ability.

Prophetic Evasion (Su): At 3rd level, a blind assassin's Timesight powers grant her an ability similar to the Evasion ability of monks and rogues. If a blind assassin makes a successful Reflex saving throw against an attack that normally deals half damage on a successful save, the blind assassin instead takes no damage. Prophetic Evasion can only be used if the blind assassin is wearing light armour or no armour.

Improved Prophetic Sight (Su): By 4th level, the blind assassin has become in tune enough with her prescient abilities that she need not concentrate on them. This has three substantial effects. First, the blind assassin's Prophetic Sight ability applies to every moving creature or object in range of her Timesight ability, not just one. Second, the insight bonuses granted increase to +3 each. Third, the blind assassin also gains a +3 insight bonus to initiative.

Improved Prophetic Evasion (Su): This ability, gained at 5th level, functions like Prophetic Evasion (see above). The blind assassin takes no damage at all on successful saving throws against attacks that allow a Reflex saving throw for half damage (breath weapon, fireball, and so on). What's more, she takes only half damage even if she fails her saving throw, since the blind assassin's prescience and reflexes allow her to get out of harm's way with incredible speed.



Ask The Oracle

If you have a problem, if no one else can help, and if you can find him, maybe you can ask... the Oracle.

The Oracle, otherwise known as Caliban Loreseeker, is a wise fountain of D&D knowledge. His comprehension of the rules is unbounded, his knowledge of the rulebooks is infinite, and his ego is pretty large too. If you have a question for the Oracle, please email him at caliban_loreseeker@yahoo.com. Each month he will select the questions that he feels most inclined to answer, and his wise verdict will be posted here.

If a party listens at a door and hears nothing, but the inhabitants within the room succeed in hearing the party, is the party surprised if they are expecting something within from previous experience? For example - they have just entered two similar rooms and met monsters, and have every reason to suspect that this room is inhabited also.

Different ways of starting an encounter are covered on page 61 of the DMG. In the situation you describe, I would recommend giving the monsters in the room 1 round to prepare before the party opens the door (drawing weapons, loading crossbows, taking cover, etc). Whether or not the party is actually surprised when they open the door should depend on how they handle actually opening the door. If they accept the results of their listen check and just open the door without displaying any special caution, give the orcs a surprise round. If the players state they are opening the door slowly with shields ready, for example, then just have everyone roll for initiative normally.

Why do they have Masterwork Artisans Tools in the PHB, but not a Masterwork Disguise Kit?

Can an unarmed AoO be made? Even a fighter with a bow in his hand... can he kick anyone passing by his side? After all the person opened his guard. If an unarmed AoO can be made ... what about AoO because of the unarmed attack? In my game this seemed important because a familiar is continually used to attack mages... and if an unarmed AoO could be done this familiar would indeed have a short lifetime.

Unarmed Attacks are covered on page 140 of the PHB, and one of the things it states there is "Striking for damage with punches, kicks, and head butts is like attack with a weapon, except for the following..." None of the exceptions listed would prevent you from using an Unarmed Attack when making an Attack of Opportunity (AoO). If you are holding a ranged weapon or reach weapon in one of your hands, nothing prevents you from

using a kick or off-hand attack to punch someone who provokes an AoO from you. However, unless you have the Improved Unarmed Strike feat, you would provoke an AoO from them in return. Most likely they will actually have a real weapon and be able inflict quite a bit more damage in return. I would also recommend a -4 attack penalty for making an Unarmed Attack when your primary hand is holding a weapon, to mirror the normal "off-hand" attack penalty. This penalty would be offset by Ambidexterity.

In the case of a familiar, animals normally use Natural Weapons when attacking, which means they are counted as "armed" when making their attack, and thus would not provoke an AoO merely for attacking. (PHB, page 140, **Unarmed Attacks**, "Armed" Unarmed Attacks) However, most familiars are tiny creatures, and thus would provoke an AoO for entering their targets square. (PHB, page 132, **Very Small Creatures**.)



If I'm trying to dispel an area effect spell such as web, with an area effect dispel magic (non-targeted), how much of the web do I need to include in my range? Would including the centre of the web dispel it? Would including a piece dispel it, or would it just dispel that piece?

From the Dispel Magic description: "For each ongoing area or effect spell centred within the dispel magic's area, the character makes a dispel check to dispel the spell." So if the centre of the Web spell is within the area affected of by the Dispel Magic, the entire Web is dispelled.

Also from the Dispel Magic spell: "For each ongoing spell whose area overlaps that of the dispel, the character makes a dispel check to end the effect, but only within the area of the dispel magic." So if you don't actually get the centre of the Web spell with the Dispel Magic area, it can still remove any portion of the Web spell that does fall within the area of the Dispel Magic.

Why do they have Masterwork Artisans Tools in the PHB, but not a Masterwork Disguise Kit? What bonus would a Masterwork Disguise Kit give?

You cannot perform a craft skill without artisan's tools, which is why they have the no-bonus version and then the +2 masterwork version. Since you don't need a disguise kit to use the disguise skill normally, the disguise kit in the equipment list is the Masterwork Disguise Kit.



Is a party surprised if they are expecting something within a room from previous experience?

If I were wearing armour would I need to check for Arcane Spell Failure if I was to cast a spell from a scroll? What about using a wand while wearing armour?

A scroll is a **Spell Completion** item. DMG, page 175, **Spell Completion**: "All that's left to do is perform the short, simple, finishing parts of the spellcasting (**The final gesture**, words, and so on)."

If the spell on the scroll doesn't have a somatic component, you don't have an Arcane Spell Failure chance. If it does, then you do. Also note that casting a spell off of a scroll takes exactly the same amount of time as casting it normally does. DMG, page 175, **Using Items**: "...The casting time of a spell is the time required to activate the same power in an item, whether it's a scroll, a wand, or a pair of boots, unless the item description specifically states otherwise." I emailed the Sage about this, and he confirmed that it overrides the part of the **Spell Completion** description that says activating a spell completion item is a standard action.

A wand is a **Spell Trigger** device. DMG, page 175, **Spell Trigger**: "**No gestures** or spell finishing is needed, just a special knowledge of spellcasting that an appropriate character would know and a single word that must be spoken." No gestures needed, so no Arcane spell failure chance, even if you are wearing full plate.

Are a Druid's (or Ranger's) animal companions (gained via the Animal Friendship spell) included in the Druids CR/XP in a similar manner to the monsters Summoned via the appropriate spells or do the PC's receive XP for them separately?

An animal companion is a class ability of the Druid or Ranger, much like a familiar for a wizard or a paladin's mount. As such, the challenge of the animal companion is included in the CR of the druid. This also means that any animal companions for the druid in your do not take a share of the groups XP.

Note: This breaks down somewhat for NPC druids that stay in one place, since they can attract double their HD in animals, as compared to a PC who can only attract animals whose total HD equals their own level (DMG, page 46, **Animal Companions**). Your DM may decide to count any animals beyond the HD of the druid as being a separate challenge, and award XP using the normal CR of the animals.

A Question for the Oracle?

Questions for the Oracle should be addressed to:

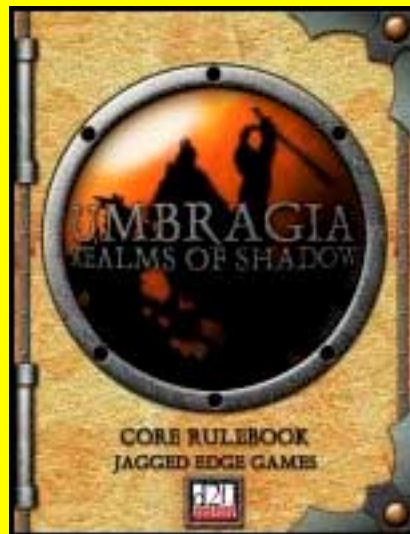
calibanloveseeke@yahoo.com

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The Oracle reserves the right to hold your question for a later issue of Asgard Magazine.

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Worlds Apart

By Jesse Dean
June 6th, 2001

Number 1: The World of Fahla

A week ago Morrus approached me with a request: would I be willing to write a column for EN World's new ezine, *Asgard*. I was duly flattered by the fact that he held me in enough regard to want me to write a column for *Asgard* but I was also hesitant. What would I write about? So I told him to give me 5 days and I would think about it. A few areas, such as world building or a d20 industry column, popped to my mind but none of them seemed compelling or interesting enough for me to want to run with.

The idea I finally decided to go with came to me when I was talking to one of my friends. This friend, who shall remain nameless, asked me if I would be willing to review his homebrew setting. I explained to him that I could only review published products for AtFantasy or *Asgard*, and he made a joke about "oh course - the average DM and world-creator self-publisher in the trenches is a nobody to the great and powerful Jesse Dean ;)". I laughed it off at the time, but a few hours later it hit me. I could write a column showcasing the various detailed d20 worlds on the internet.

Morrus thought it was a splendid idea and we worked out that I would be writing a monthly column dedicated to interviewing the world creator and writing up a preview/overview of his or her world. The first month's world will be Fahla by Arcady. It can be found at:

<http://home.pacbell.net/arcady0/fahla/>

Warning: The World of Fahla website uses Flash. If you do not have it, you can download Flash for free at:

www.macromedia.com/flash

Jesse: First off I would like to thank you for agreeing to this interview...

Arcady: I guess that means we've started. :) Sure. It should be fun to see what comes of this.

Jesse: Definitely ; -)

Jesse: What prompted you to create Fahla?

Arcady: I was running a Greyhawk game. And I started to feel constrained. It's a great world mind you, but I have this thing about world logic and creative freedom. I kept finding myself vetoing my own plot adventure ideas

because I felt they didn't fit Greyhawk. In the past I'd always run in my own worlds. Using a published world was new to me and I thought I'd give it a try for once. But it just didn't fit my style. So I thought I'd go to a world of my own. I have a fantasy world I've used for many years, but it's magic is way to far out from how magic works in DnD. And some of the cultural stuff wouldn't go over well with DnD players.

So I decided to make a world with two goals:

1. One that I felt free to do as I wished with, Where the world logic matched my own way of doing things.
2. One that would still work well with DnD.

And so that's what prompted it.

Jesse: Makes sense :) What differentiates your world from the more generic settings such as Greyhawk, Kalamar, or Forgotten Realms?

Arcady: Well... With any home world, the biggest thing is that you're in the driver's seat and you're the guy building the road up ahead. But of course I also chose a different culture base than your standard western RPG fantasy. My world is based around Egyptian - Roman Empire - and Ancient Greek themes. And I started out with a specific goal of trying to make the world 'make sense' in terms of things like cultural history, religion, and so on. Not so much Realism, but internal consistency. Kalamar has a lot of this last quality as well. In my amateur opinion at least. I think that covers the bulk of it... I know I'm forgetting one of my usual points here. :)



Jesse: What sort of inspirations (both gaming and non-gaming) influenced your world design process?

Arcady: I left my World Design Manifesto at the office. :) Inspirations... Well... I guess that's where I get into the whole Egypt/Rome flavour thing. With a dash of Greek thought. I made an active effort in each step of the way to look at how those

three cultures did things and then decide with that in mind how I wanted to do things. There isn't much in the way of a gaming influence. Other than using my GURPS Rome, Greece, and Egypt books as some of my reference material. That and a lot of web browsing. I made an active effort though to avoid being 'another fantasy RPG world'. I think most people dread being stuck with that label.

Jesse: Definitely..

Arcady: Oh... a lot of Egypt style art and my own older world were both heavy influences as well.

Jesse: Do you think you were able to avoid being another fantasy world?

Arcady: I'd wager so.

Jesse: As much as you would have liked?

Arcady: Hopefully not so much so that nobody but me can understand the thing. :)

I used to think I had nothing in common with anyone who would play DnD. Until 3E came out.

Jesse: That is another problem ;-) When did you start on Fahla?

Arcady: Well I was actively trying to control myself. My old fantasy world is one I've had since 1987. But it's never had a successful run in with players. I've settled on using it for artwork. So with Fahla while I wanted far out there I also needed to remind myself to hold back a lot.

When did I start? Let's see... the exact date is still referenced on the EN boards. Hold on a second...

I started Fahla on April 6, 2001 at 1:33PM or probably about 30 minutes before that when I actually started typing that post... :)

<http://dynamic.gamespy.com/~dnd3e/ubb/Forum18/HTML/000065.html>

Looking at that post again I can see some of what was influencing me at that moment. Another major thing I wanted to do with this world was give a logical reason why Humans can breed with elves and Orcs. Or at least an interesting reason.

Jesse: Do you think using Eric Noah's DnD3e board helped you greatly in the making of your setting?

Arcady: Most likely I got a good amount of feedback. Some of it I used. Some of it just reinforced what I wanted to stay away from. But both of those are useful things to learn. The EN Chatroom from time to time has had a similar usefulness for me.

Jesse: Oh? How?

Arcady: Mulling over ideas and seeing the reaction.

Jesse: Yes, I have used the EN Chatroom in that manner on more than one occasion.

Arcady: The big use of both of those places is that they let you see if you've gone too far. Of course I have a likely established reputation of not seeing things the same way as at least a very vocal portion of the EN community. :)

Jesse: That's ok. I am sure there are at least a segment that agree with you.

Arcady: That's always a surprise to me. I used to think I had nothing in common with anyone who would play DnD. Until 3E came out. :)

Jesse: I usually find I agree with far more of your posts than I disagree with. Which may be why I always butt heads with my players in regards to storylines and setting vs. other elements.

Arcady: But I get a good mix of comments back now. I think I'd go nuts if everyone agreed with me. I'd start plotting a revolution against myself. :)



Jesse: I know how that feels

Has Fahla through many revisions since it was created?

Arcady: Oh heck yeah. It's a constant work in progress. This is both a feature and a curse of a home made world. You can revise anything anytime you want and nobody can bat an eye at you for it. But on the other hand you find yourself unable to stop revising it. :) It's too much fun.

Some of the major things that got revised were the deities. The racial lineup. The geography. And even the choice of government type. Though government type got one revision early on and that stuck. Deities I actually started a new revision for this morning. Mostly to detail them more. But I recently added the idea of Saints to the pantheon in order to give me room for assorted fringe cults. The racial lineup took me a long time to nail down. I wanted at least one unusual race from the start. The trouble was finding the right one.

In the end I settled on Kobolds. Descendants of a conquered nation. Mostly slaves in the campaign location. Though it's been long enough that many are free. I expanded on their lawful nature. Thinking on how a bunch of lawful conniving types would thrive in an old, lawful, bureaucratic nation. But I'm always fine tuning things.

That seems to end that one. :) Revision is a constant process. I can kind of understand why published campaigns always get so much 'update' in future books. It's hard to keep your hands off. Though with a published setting I must say it bugs me.



This is both a feature and a curse of a home made world. You can revise anything anytime you want and nobody can bat an eye at you for it. But on the other hand you find yourself unable to stop revising it.

Jesse: How much influence do your players have on your setting?

Arcady: They're only just beginning to. We've had one play session of it, and I've got their backgrounds from that. Some of them had a lot of ideas in there that will end up filtering into the world in a number of ways. Also when they were making their characters I bounced a lot of ideas off of them. Most of them just sit there and say, "that sounds cool". A few toss ideas back. Those are the players that are worth gold. The final call for Kobolds was largely a result of my players really liking the idea.

I'm hoping that as the game goes and the world ages I will get a lot more stuff from the players. It's only then a world truly starts to live. Right now it's so new they're just working to a good handle on it.

It's not like Nemmerle's world. Not something I've had for years and years of player feedback. But hopefully in time it will get there.



Jesse: Right, understood. I have no clue if I will ever have a world that makes it that far. I too often get side-tracked and restart or distracted.

Arcady: Few of us do with the same players.

Jesse: I rarely play the same setting twice. At least homebrewed I occasionally use a published one a few times. But after I do I rarely come back.

What is important to you in setting design?

Arcady: Well. Consistency is a BIG one. If A happens here... B should happen there. And that should follow a trend that fits the nature of the world. Logical geography. Logical histories. Actual consideration for the affect of magic on the people. Religions that make sense for the culture of the people practising them. Religion is shaped by culture. Or culture is shaped by religion. Depending on how active those gods are.

This is in the end going to have some interesting effects in my world were there is only one pantheon. It will mean that on some level there will be a certain constant theme in all of the cultures. Even though the people have their own interpretations of that pantheon. But I'm pretty far away still from detailing the other nations of the world. Let's see... Playability is also an important concern. You have to balance things off

against that. But it in no way means you abandon logical design.

I want a world that if I found myself suddenly gated into I would stand there and think, "This makes no sense... somebody must've slipped me LSD." Err, wouldn't that is.

If goldfish fly... it should make sense and be consistent with the rest of the world.

Jesse: Don't worry, I am going to go through and fix all the typos before this is published.
(Note from editor – well, someone is...)

Arcady: Now I'm getting ideas for flying Goldfish and swimming cats...

Jesse: What do you think the strengths of Fahla are?

Arcady: Well... It's different. It explores a 'point of reference' that I personally feel makes for a more logical choice for fantasy role-play than medieval Europe. It fits together. It's quite detailed for its age. It fits me. Which is the greatest strength any world can have: being a match for it's DM/GM. It's not clean and utopian. But it's not overly messy either. There's no neon sign that points out the good guys. Morality is not that clear. Read my Lips: No major Uber-NPCs. :) I think the fact that at least to my mind; it holds up to logic, is a major strength. Of course no matter how fast I type there'll always be 2 times or more stuff still in my head than is written down. :) And hopefully I haven't left the logic part in my head. :) I feel at least that the world has plenty of opportunity for adventure. I'm already itching to toss those poor buggers who think they're special PCs out into a million different situations. :)

Read my Lips: No major Uber-NPCs.

Jesse: What do you think the weaknesses of Fahla are?

Arcady: Well number one is that I have to do all the work. It's also a bit different than most players are used to. So I expect to encounter some problems with people getting used to the different mindset.

Maps for many people. It lacks maps. I'm not a map person so this is likely to stay a problem for a while. I tend to just describe things in terms of overall region. It's not as finished as the published worlds tend to be. And of course... it has a serious lack of artwork. I'll address this eventually. And I'm always open to contributions. :)

Jesse: Hopefully you will get some :)

Arcady: For visual people, that can be a big issue. My group has 3 artists in it though. And one player who's married to an artist. So this one is bound to change eventually. Last session I asked a player to name a person his PC competes with in his job... the guy did an illustration and handed it to me. :)



Jesse: Cool. I doubt I will ever get my setting illustrated. I lack artistic talent.

Arcady: It's a hard issue to deal with for home worlds. If you find the art important. One of my players is completely non visual. Art does nothing for him.

Jesse: Why should a reader look at your setting?

Arcady: Got me.

Jesse: No reasons at all?

Arcady: No... I suppose it would make an interesting source of ideas. I'd love it if I could get somebody to run it for me. But I'd probably go nuts feeling they were getting it wrong. The different style of setting should be interesting to some. It's a chance to see one way of doing something else. Perhaps people could come away with an idea of things they might want to consider in their own games that they hadn't thought about before. I know that happens for me when I look at other people's worlds. It also offers a good sneak peak into my mind - for those who desire such. :) Some people may even find they want to take a piece of it, modify it a bit; and staple it into their own world. I think we all do a bit of that.

Sometime I dread my players like a deer on the road dreads those oncoming headlights.

Jesse: Is there anything else you would like to share with us? That's the last question.

Arcady: Hmmm... I'm always open to ideas. If anybody gets one when looking at my world I'd love to hear it. I'd really like to know what people think of it. My goal is to make something fun, engaging, and memorable for both me and my players. If anyone else can find something enjoyable out of it, that's only a bonus. Or rather... All the better. Something like that. :) I'm having a lot of fun with the world design process. It's a lot funner than the actual gaming process.

Jesse: That I can usually agree on.

Arcady: Sometime I dread my players like a deer on the road dreads those oncoming headlights. I've got this wonderful world I'm all happy about... and they come along with a bulldozer and wreck the place in the first five seconds. :) But every world designer gets a bit of that feeling going.

Jesse: Right I sort of feel sorry for published worlds.

Arcady: I'm kind of curious about the other interviews I'll be sharing a spot with. Those lucky buggers will get to read me first so they know what not to say. :) I get to be the fool for the crowd as the first victim. :)

Jesse: LOL

Arcady: Yeah. Published worlds really get it. :) You can't be perfect in this. But once you're published everybody gets a chance to attack you. :) Even me. :) Guess that's all for now...?

Jesse: Yep. Thanks for the interview.



Got a homebrewed world?

Want to show it off?

Let us know!

Email us at:

morris@lineone.net



PREVIEWS

Shadow of the Exile
Privateer Press
\$9.95
Release Date: July, 2001



I'll admit it - I've been looking forward to writing this preview for ages. I am currently running *The Longest Night*, the first adventure in this trilogy, and was therefore eager to see what the authors had in store for the second instalment. Please bear this in mind when you read my preview - remember that I *want* to like this book.

Shadow of the Exile is the second adventure in the Witchfire Trilogy by Privateer Press. The trilogy is set in the Iron Kingdoms setting, a dark fantasy setting with a healthy injection of steampunk. As yet, there is no sourcebook on the Iron Kingdoms, but the adventures produced by Privateer Press have a reasonable amount of information about the world in them, easily enough to run the adventure. There is also an Iron Kingdoms website with further information and maps (see the related links at the bottom of this page), and Privateer assure us that the IK sourcebook will be out later this year, along with their monster book, the *Monsternomicom*.

Right then. The first big piece of news is something I've been dying to tell people for weeks, but I promised that I would keep my mouth shut. However, Privateer have now officially announced that, like *The Longest Night*, this adventure kind of ended up a little bigger than previously planned. So, like it's predecessor, it has been expanded to 64 pages - *for exactly the same price*. I like that.

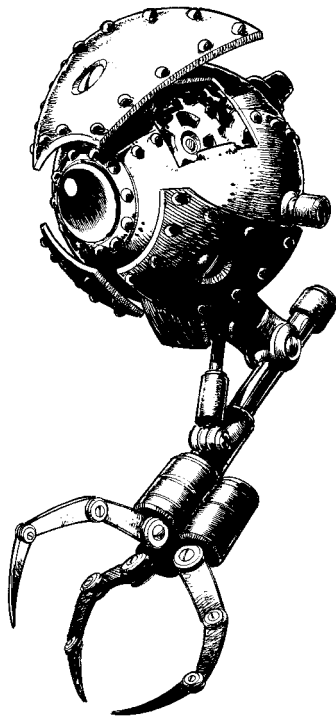
I'll try not to give too much of the plot away here. *Shadow of the Exile* continues where *The Longest Night* left off. Astute readers, who are familiar with the previous adventure, may well guess from the title as to part of the plot

of this book (and, in my estimation, the real plot behind the entire trilogy - although I'll have to wait for Part III to find out if I'm right), although there is far more to the adventure than that.

The cover art is superb - even better than on the first book, and the interior art is of a similar high quality. Brian Snoddy and Matt Wilson have outdone themselves. You can download a wallpaper of the cover at Privateer's website (www.privateerpress.com).

We begin the book with a 6 page introduction to the Iron Kingdoms. This is not the same information as was found at the beginning of *The Longest Night* - here we have information of the birth of the kingdoms, details about the various nations/kingdoms (Cygnaar, Ord, Llael, Menoth, Khador), lands beyond the Iron Kingdoms - Rhul, the land of the Dwarves; Ios, the home of the Elves; The Kingdom of Cryx, ruled by the oldest dragon in the world; and the Bloodstone Marches, believed to be empty but really home to an as yet unknown race.

I now jump to the back of the book - the appendices. I'll deal with these before diving into the adventure itself. First we have 13 monsters - some of these are new, others come from *The Longest Night*. Most are the inhabitants of the swampy lands outside the City of Corvis (*Razorbats*, *Cane Leeches*, *Swamp Gobbers*, *Gatormen*, and so on). Others, like the *Clockwork Priest* and the spherical mechanical *Servitors of Cyriss*, are classic examples of the steampunk elements prevalent throughout the Iron Kingdoms setting. We then have a few pages of NPCs, each with a couple of paragraphs of background and full stats (by the way - if you run this adventure, try and make Julian Helstrom talk and sound like Russell Crowe in *Gladiator* - it works, trust me).



Appendix C deals with firearms. One and a half pages of rules dealing with pistols, rifles and small cannon, along with the relevant skills needed to operate such devices. The vague rules in *The Longest Night* are clarified and expanded upon; for those of you who really need to know, the skill you are looking for is called *Craft (small arms)*. Half a page of information on ammunition, it's alchemical construction, and its cost and availability. The firearms rules have also been released by Privateer Press as a free pdf download (see link below).

Well, that's the peripheral stuff all dealt with. Now for the true meat of this product - the adventure itself. Privateer claim that this adventure is even better than its predecessor. While this is not a review, per se, I do intend to test the validity of that claim!

Please be aware - spoilers follow. If you are a player, stop reading now - this is for your DM's eyes. After all, he's the one who'll probably end up paying for the thing! I will try, nevertheless, to keep spoilers to a minimum.

At the end of *The Longest Night*, Alexia attacked Corvis with an army of undead. The PCs managed (presumably!) to head off this attack, but Alexia escaped with the blade *Witchfire*. Father Dumas learns of her destination and asks the PCs to try and catch her and, if possible, bring her home safely. Alexia's destination is a mythical temple, that of the Clockwork Goddess (cue some interesting monsters).

The first Act deals with the PCs' journey to the temple. This includes their investigations into the actual location of said temple, the trip by

steamship to get there and various encounters en route. Each encounter has a title, a timing indicator (e.g. any time the boat is stopped for the night, any time after the swampie village etc.) and it's purpose (to spill some blood, to provide an obstacle or to provide some vital information). The PCs are largely led by the nose here, but the encounters are so varied and interesting that it's hard to find fault with them.

The second Act deals with the temple itself - an enormous mechanical contraption with mechanical guardians (the Servitors of Cyriss are great!), moving parts and weird machines. This is, essentially, a dungeon crawl with a climactic encounter with Alexia at the end. It is at this point that the PCs finally get their hands on the *Witchfire* blade. The blade itself is a very powerful, evil artefact, and is not intended to be actually used by the PCs. In fact, there are some rather unpleasant consequences for those that try to wield it.



The third Act returns the PCs to Corvis. Corvis, in their absence, has fallen to an enemy from the past. Those who know something of the Iron Kingdoms' background may be able to guess who. Father Dumas has been taken prisoner, and Captain 'Russell Crowe' Helstrom assists them in a jailbreak. The PCs need to avoid watchmen, Inquisitors (there - I gave it away!) and somehow free their ally and hide him from the authorities. Of course, you can guess what evil artefact the authorities are looking for...

And here the adventure ends. We are left at something of a cliff-hanger, waiting to see what happens in Part III of the Witchfire Trilogy. Is it better than the first part? Hmm...I'll go with a reserved 'yes' bearing in mind that I have not yet finished running Part I, let alone this module. And yes, I kind of messed up on the 'no spoilers' aspect of this preview, although I left out some very important details. 😊

An interview with Matt and Etien Staroscik of Privateer Press

Hello. Would you please introduce yourselves for our readers' benefit?

M: I'm Matt Staroscik, the president and co-founder of Privateer Press.

E: I'm Etien Staroscik, the production manager / occasional web mistress of Privateer Press.

We're here to talk about *The Witchfire Trilogy* and the Iron Kingdoms setting. Would you tell us a little about the setting and what makes it different from, say, the Forgotten Realms or Greyhawk?

M: The Iron Kingdoms differs in some pretty big ways. First and most obviously we have a lot higher tech level than the other fantasy settings. The IK features steam-powered gadgets and even magic-based firearms. The tech is not ubiquitous, and the IK is still a fantasy setting, but it definitely has a steampunk twist. And I do mean "twist," these elements don't dominate the setting. Secondly, there's the "feel" of the game world. It's hard to summarise, but we are doing a lot of just plain different things with the setting. I think people will be pleasantly surprised with some of the directions we are going in when they see what we've done to Elves, Dwarves and their favourite character classes. Our aim is to make things familiar enough to be comfortable, but different enough to be interesting. People can get a preview of the IK at its official web site, IronKingdoms.com. We talk a little about the realm's history, the nations and the gods. This material is actually from Book 2 of the trilogy, but we decided to release it early and for free because so many people were clamouring for it!

We have received a lot of email saying things like, "I never liked the idea of guns or steam power in D&D, but you guys made it work. I'm a believer!"



Art by Brian Snoddy. © & TM 2000 Privateer Press LLC.
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Some people are a little wary of the 'steampunk' elements of the Iron Kingdoms. What would you say to these people?

M: First, I would say, "give it a chance!" We have received a lot of email saying things like, "I never liked the idea of guns or steam power in D&D, but you guys made it work. I'm a believer!"

Believe it or not I am not a fan of genre "collisions," and the Iron Kingdoms is first and foremost a fantasy setting. There are guns and steam-powered machines in there, sure, but these elements do not displace the classic swords & sorcery. The guns in the IK are even magical; alchemists need to make the ammo, which is rare and expensive.

People who really can't stand the thought of steam power and firearms in their D&D game can remove these elements from our products. They do not dominate the game world, but I do think that they enhance it.

***The Longest Night* has received rave reviews here at EN World and has been in the 'Best of the Best' list since it was released. What is the secret of your success?**

M: We thought that people would respond to an interesting story in an interesting setting, so we set out to design those two things. It would have been easier and less risky to do a generic orc-smash adventure, but generic isn't our style. The Iron Kingdoms was designed very carefully to push the boundaries of fantasy in ways that we thought people would like. We seem to be on to something.

I also need to give a lot of credit to our artists, Brian Snoddy and Matt Wilson. *The Longest Night* has great art, and people really respond to that. The art ties the whole package together and really brings the world to life. It's really a team effort.

You told me recently that you believe *Shadow of the Exile* to be even better. What have you improved upon in the second adventure of the trilogy?

E: Well there is always a learning curve, and TLN was our first product. Beyond that we have also been able to implement the changes that the fan base wanted in the first book. For instance, people were upset that we didn't have handouts in TLN, so SotE has them.

M: I think that the adventure itself is better. Less intricate perhaps, but it will be easier for the DM to manage. There is also a lot more action, and we introduce a very interesting faction within the Iron Kingdoms – the worshippers of the machine goddess, Cyrriss. TLN was a good adventure, and Corvis is a neat city, but in SOTE the PCs will get a very strong dose of IK flavour. In TLN, the DM got most of that by reading the background material... SOTE puts the IK more "in your face."

Secondly the art is, somehow, about twice as good. Brian and Matt really outdid themselves. (By the way, we will be letting the people on our mailing list see a sneak preview of art from SOTE next week!)

When can we expect to see the final instalment, *All the King's Men*?

M: We've actually changed the name to "*The Sleeping Legion*." It drives our distributors nuts that we changed it, but it fits the book better. We were hoping to have TSL released at the end of July, but it is looking more like August now.



Can we expect to see the steampunk elements of IK expanded upon in a future product?

M: The IK sourcebook, currently planned for November, will expand on a lot of the IK's unique technology. We will be releasing some material in advance of that too, in other books and on the web.

Can we expect to see any rules for the construction of Steamjacks any time soon?

M: That material is actually under way right now. It will probably be seen in the IK sourcebook, though we may preview a portion of it earlier.

After the *Witchfire Trilogy* and your upcoming Iron Kingdoms sourcebook and monster collection (*The Monsternomicon*), what can we expect to see from Privateer Press?

M: We have a lot of things planned. After the *Witchfire* trilogy is concluded we'll be putting all our efforts into the Iron Kingdoms setting. There will be city guides and other references to really flesh out the world. There will be occasional adventure products too, but we probably won't do another trilogy.

We're listening closely to the d20 community, and I invite people to email us and let us know what they want to see. Also, we will be running some polls on our web site, and I hope we'll get a lot of participation there.

We're listening closely to the d20 community, and I invite people to email us and let us know what they want to see.

Would you agree that the d20 market seems to be bloated with products, especially low level adventures, at present? What impact does this have on your future plans?

M: There are certainly a lot of products out there but I think the market is strong enough to support many D20 companies. The crowded field doesn't really change our plans.

Have you any favourite products out there (aside from your own, of course!) And is there anything that you are particularly looking forward to?

M: My favourite D20 product out right now is Chaosium's Elric book. I am most looking forward to the Call of Cthulhu book from Wizards, because I am a big HPL fan. I'm not convinced that D20 is the best system for CoC, but we'll see soon enough.

E: I don't know if I have a favourite, but the Slayers Guides intrigue me.

Do you have any plans for GenCon?

M: We won't be at Gen Con in an official capacity, but Matt Wilson will be at the con's art show. You'll be able to visit him there and see cool Iron Kingdom's art, get books signed, and maybe get him to tattoo Alexia on your butt. He'll be doing an update on his Gen Con schedule soon at mattwilsonart.com.

Who do you think will do well in the ENnies this year?

M: White Wolf, Fiery Dragon and Wizards come to mind.

What do you think of your own chances of walking away with an award or two?

M: I'd like to think we have a good chance of taking home an award, but I don't want to get cocky!

Changing the subject a little, would you please tell us a little about yourselves? In particular, I am referring to your role-playing history.

M: I was into gaming pretty much from the time I was old enough to understand the rulebooks. My first RPG was actually Gamma World, and then I moved into Basic D&D (the ugly blue book The first box was the red one). Almost immediately I got into AD&D, and while I played quite a bit of it I actually spent more time with other games: Traveller: 2300, Teenagers from Outer Space, Millennium's

End, Twilight: 2000 and Vampire. In high school I also spent a lot of time writing and playing home-brewed rule systems with friends. These systems were usually insanely complicated. They fit our style of play quite well but I would never want to inflict them on the public. (Anyone who wants to see some of that stuff can check out my personal web site, wrongcrowd.com.)

E: I played Vampire in high school, but I have never been a big time gamer.

Which player character, past or present, brings you your fondest memories?

M: Tough call, but my favourite was a mute half-elven assassin. Sadly that campaign is long over.

E: Well my current favourite character is Devinae, she is part of my growing Everquest addiction.

Etien, I've asked you this before but I thought our readers might like to know.

Then again, they might not care 😊.

Anyway - how does one pronounce your name?

E: The eternal question, I think I have boiled it down to the following phonetic pronunciation... *eh-tee-en*.

Which d20 system website would you say shines above all the rest in terms of quality, content, utility and presentation? (By the way I will be editing your answer to say EN World so you might as well just say it!) 😊

M: The sites I visit most often are Eric Noah's, Jamis Buck's RPG Generators, RPG Action and, yes, d20 Reviews/EN World. RPG United is also building a nice site.
(<http://rpg.flekkefjord.org/eng/index2.html>)

E: I really like what you guys have done at EN World, it has been a great tool and you guys have been the best. Thank you.

Is there anything else that you would like to say before we finish here?

M: I'd just like to thank everyone for their support!

Thank you for your time.

M: De nada.

E: De rien.

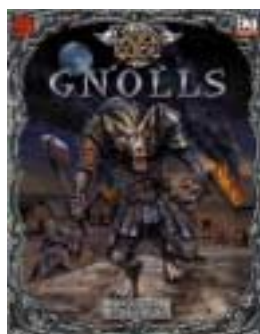


Slayer's Guide to Gnolls

Mongoose Publishing

\$7.99

Release Date: July, 2001



You may well remember that I previewed *The Slayer's Guide to Hobgoblins* about a month back. Well, I'm back again with the second book in Mongoose Publishing's *Slayer's Guide* series. This time the monster under the microscope is the Gnoll.

The Slayer's Guide to Gnolls very much resembles the previous book in appearance, layout and structure. This 32 page book covers much the same areas (although, of course, with different content), and anyone who has read *Hobgoblins* will have a fair idea of what to expect. As in *Hobgoblins*, there are boxed out sections of narrative here and there, some a couple of lines long, others up to a page in length. These certainly help to characterise the sometimes dry text. The cover is impressive, in full colour, depicting a battle-ready Gnoll, and the artwork inside is a mixture of pencil and ink drawings, all in black and white.

We begin with **Gnoll Physiology** - their sharpened senses, dietary requirements, life cycle and mindset. Did you know that hungry male Gnolls will often consume the young in their lair if they can get past the females? Or that deep, bass sounds far below the human level of hearing can cause confusion, distress or anger to all Gnolls within a range of four or five miles? Well - you do now!

The second chapter deals with **Habitat** - information on preferred climates and environs, along with a short essay on lairs. Gnolls, as you may already know, live in burrows - usually someone else's burrow!

Gnoll Society is a long section (6 pages) and deals with social groupings (family groups and packs - there is a pecking order of family groups within the pack, and a pecking order of individuals within each family group). Might, as you may well expect, makes Right in this society, and those in charge are the dominant males. Family groups may wander from pack to pack at will, and there's no real sense of loyalty towards one's fellows.

Packs also acquire a slave population for menial tasks, as Gnolls are psychologically incapable of prolonged toil. Slaves are, of course, underfed and overworked, and the average life expectancy is about 30 days - less if some Gnoll decides to eat him. One delightful quote from this book is: *"All too often a slave's last moments consist of watching two Gnolls fight for the right to eat him, then being slowly consumed, feet first, by the victor."* This section also includes a description of life as a slave from the point of



view of one that got away. The short version: not a fun day out.

This section is rounded off with a couple of pages on religion - the unnamed Demon Lord who is the patron deity of all Gnolls, religious celebrations in the Groll calendar (don't be near a Groll lair at these times unless you enjoy being the prey of a religion-crazed Groll hunting party), Groll clerics and Groll druids... *"rapacious druids [who] pervert and control the forces of nature to their own selfish ends."* I enjoyed this new take on an old character class, even though it is only a side note.

Next we have **Methods of Warfare**, including weapons and armour (it's an English publisher, and we spell it *armour* over here, OK?) and battle tactics. The latter range from ambushes (frequent), to open warfare (avoided as much as possible) and defence of the lair.

Role-Playing with Gnolls is a DM's section. Here we are presented with advice on how to run Gnolls in the game and how to build Groll lairs (*"...think disorganisation, filth and brutality."*) This section is about a page in length, and gives tips on how to portray the characteristics described in previous sections - how the groll's senses affect the way it is played, how their chaotic nature affects combat and so forth. These tips are specific, and help to illustrate some of the preceding information.

Scenario Hooks and Ideas - as with *Hobgoblins*, Mongoose Publishing gives us a few interesting hooks with which to introduce Gnolls to the game and to demonstrate their unique characteristics. Eight short ideas in all, these range from *'Poor Baby'*, to *'The Enemy of My Enemy'*, to *'And We Are Supposed To Help?'*. These are useful, and some are downright original - I liked this section very much.

Next on the menu is **Gnolls as Player Characters**. This is a page of information including the Groll racial traits, some Groll names and a few recommendations on how to play such a creature. It begins with a nice line: *"Gnolls are a very difficult race to role-play well, as they are utterly hateful of most other races and have very few redeeming qualities."* Sounds perfect for one of my ex-players!

Edendale is a five-page look at a Groll lair. A page of background information (how the Gnolls came by the lair, and some information on the Groll pack itself). Then we have a keyed map of the 2-level burrow (and a nice little rule on the dangers of catching a disease whilst in the Slave Chamber). The last page of this section provides stats on Eenoga, the pack leader, and a couple of paragraphs on how to use Edendale in your campaign. There is a pen drawing of Edendale inside the back cover.

The **Groll Reference List** includes stats for a pack leader, a dominant male, a Groll warrior and Groll young. Useful if you want to use non-typical Gnolls in your game and you don't have the time to mess around with the advancement rules in the *Monster Manual*.

The last page of text in this book consists of a narrative of an ambush from the point of view of a Groll named Rayk. It's a nice little piece, which illustrates the animal cunning and savagery of the creatures, especially since the humans in the piece are referred to throughout simply as 'prey'.

So, to summarise: a thorough book, useful to DMs who wish to add life to the Gnolls in their game. If you liked *The Slayer's Guide to Hobgoblins* then you'll like this book. Occasionally dry in places, but full of useful bits to lift and use in your game. My favourite parts - the adventure hooks and ideas, Edendale, and the narratives throughout which added great atmosphere and brought to life the information being read. Oh, and the publisher is English. Which is good. 😊



Legions of Hell
Green Ronin Publishing
\$14.95
Release Date: Available NOW



Legions of Hell is a 64 page book packed with the various inhabitants of Hell. Within its duo-colour pages are 41 monsters with CRs ranging from 1/2 to 20. Also included is a small collection of prestige classes and templates.

The book opens with a brief overview of Hell. It describes the nine circles, and the Lords that rule them (albeit briefly); most of the names here will be familiar to old-school AD&D players, and to those who own the old *Guide to Hell*, which was written by the same author. Beelzebub, Mephistopheles and Asmodeus all make welcome returns, although one or two of the Lords have been replaced with new ones, such as Leviathan, Lord of the 5th Circle, a sea-monster of epic proportions (we're talking *miles* in length here . . .) Sadly, these Lords are granted only a paragraph each and are not stat'd but, as Chris Pramas



pointed out in my interview with him (the link to this is at the bottom of this page), until the Epic Level rules appear from WotC, it would be impossible to do such powerful beings justice.

This is followed by a page dealing with the politics of Hell, the relationship between devils and the prime-material plane, a brief section on Baatezu (devil) qualities and a couple of paragraphs on customising one's demons.

And then we have the meat of the book. 41 monsters, ranging from the lowly 1/2 CR 'Knockers' to the mighty nobles of Hell, such as Bune, Duke of Eloquence. There are 15 such 'named' nobles.

Every monster begins on a new page, although a couple take up more than a single page. Each and every one comes with a colour illustration of (in my opinion, at least) good quality. The information and layout is otherwise similar to that of the Monster Manual. The monsters (devils) themselves appear to be well thought out, and many are great original concepts.

There isn't room here to list all of the monsters in this book, but I will list the 'named' nobles of Hell (note that these are not the same as the Lords mentioned above - they are unique inhabitants of Hell, but do not actually rule one of the circles):

- Lel, Marquise of the Night
- Balan, Master of the Infernal Hunt
- Hadriel, Duchess of Domination
- Naamah, Contessa of Duplicity
- Furas, Duke of Rhetoric
- Krotep, Pharaoh of Axor
- Vuall, Duke of Pleasure
- Nekhet, Prophet of Set
- Dagon, Warden of the Stygian Depths
- Malgrin, Duke of Unlife
- Antaia, the Witch Queen
- Jalie Squarefoot, the Lich Fiend
- Nergal, the Fetid Prince
- Bune, Duke of Eloquence

There is a fairly even spread of monsters covering the entire CR range, with about 2

creatures to each CR up to 20. Unlike the outsiders in the *Monster Manual*, Green Ronin provides us with devils to throw at parties of any level.

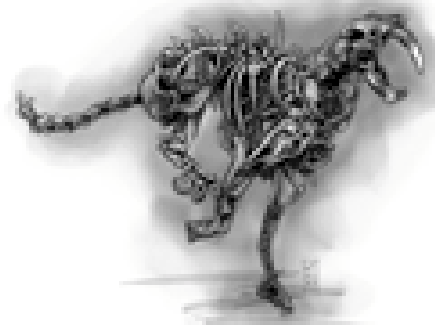
There is another noticeable difference between these creatures and those found in the Core Rulebooks. The Baatezu and Tanar'ri in the *Monster Manual* (and its predecessors) have always tended to have a wide array of abilities, without a great deal to distinguish one from another. The devils presented in *Legions of Hell* are more themed - any given critter's abilities centre around a certain

theme, and each is distinct from the next. Sure, there are 'standard' Baatezu traits common to all of the creatures presented here, but it's the unique abilities of each monster that sticks out here - abilities such as *Make Barren*, *Soulstiff* and *Impregnating Bite* to name but three.

Some of the monsters do, admittedly, come across as 'stock' creatures and appear less unique than others. But there are some real gems here (other than the unique nobles mentioned above). The Gladiatrix, the Pain Mistress, and the Distender spring to mind. Each and every one is delightfully evil - in a way that those in the MM are not.

Toward the back of the book appear the appendices (a good place to put them I say!). Appendix 1 presents three new prestige classes - *Balan's Jackal*, a brutal, bloodthirsty follower of Balan who must undergo a horrific initiation ritual; *The Mountebank*, a cunning, malicious agent of Jalie the Lich Fiend; and the *Plaguelord*, assassin followers of Nergal, the Fetid Prince.

We then move on to Appendix 2, which I especially like, for it deals with the concept of Fallen Celestials. Several of the nobles listed above are fallen celestials, and here we have a template to be applied to any celestial. This two page section is well written and littered with Dante/Milton-esque references. In my opinion, these are the perfect bad guys and the true gem of this book. The only thing worse than pure evil is pure good corrupted to evil...



Appendix 3 deals with the Celestial Choirs. This is well written hierarchy of the Seven Heavens. There are no stats here, but most of this information can be found in the *Monster Manual* or other sources. Most people will be relatively familiar with the Seraphim, the Cherubim et al. We are also presented with a selection of Fallen Celestials resident in the circles of Hell, which include some of the Lords and Nobles already mentioned in the book. This list gives their previous Celestial status (Archangel, Cherub etc.), their allegiance and a brief sentence of description. A following table lists some of the Samyasan Host, Celestials barred from heaven after falling victim to earthly pleasure on the prime material plane.

Appendices 4 and 5 include a list of creatures by Challenge Rating and an extensive bibliography, which gives a glimpse into some of the research and inspiration behind this book.

And there we have it. *Legions of Hell* by Green Ronin Publishing. An introduction to the d20 version of Hell. It's well-written, it looks nice, it's evil, it's nasty, and it's going to be used in my campaign...

play board games, card games, minis game, or RPGs. It's all good.

I was toying with the idea of doing a samurai book, and Jim said, "You wrote the Guide to Hell, Chris, you should rewrite that for 3E."

Why did Green Ronin choose to produce a monster book of demons and devils?

You can blame Jim Bishop (ex-WotC producer of Master Tools and all around evil man). Jim was at my house for our weekly D&D game and we were talking about Green Ronin's plans. I was toying with the idea of doing a samurai book, and Jim said, "You wrote the *Guide to Hell*, Chris, you should rewrite that for 3E."

I didn't want to step on any toes at WotC, so a straight rewrite was out. However, Jim had a point in that Hell is a really sexy topic. I thought about it and came up with the idea of doing a monster book. That would let me touch on the politics of Hell, while giving DMs a nice crunchy book that was eminently useful.

EN World d20 Interviews

An interview with Chris Pramas of Green Ronin Publishing

Hello Chris. Would you please introduce yourself for the benefit of our readers?

I am Chris Pramas, writer, game designer, and publisher. I've been working professionally in the game biz since 1993, and have worked on such games as AD&D, WFRP, Over the Edge, Feng Shui, In Nomine, and the Whispering Vault (which I also used to publish). I'm the founder of Green Ronin Publishing, and I'm also the Creative Director for minis for Wizards of the Coast.

What is your pedigree as a game designer?

I got into the business as a freelancer RPG writer. The nice thing about that job is that you can pick your projects and work for as many companies as will have you. From a game-design point of view, it was great to write for so many different systems. In 1998 I went to work for the TSR part of WotC as an RPG designer. Eighteen months and six books later I had learned a lot about designing for D&D and working at a big corporations. Lessons I apply on a daily basis.

And your history as a gamer? What games have you played, and for how long have you been playing D&D or AD&D?

Oh, the last thing you want is a list of all the games I've played! Let's just say that I got into gaming in 1978, with the white box original D&D. I was quite young at the time and I didn't really understand that there were different types of gamers. This proved a great boon, as I didn't think twice about playing D&D one day, Squad Leader the next, and Car Wars the next. It was all gaming to me, and I basically retain that attitude today. I'll happily

Many people are starting to complain about the number of monster books appearing. What makes this one stand out?

There actually haven't been all that many as yet. WotC did *Monsters of Faerûn* and then there's the *Creature Collection*. In any case, I think *Legions* will stand out for three reasons. First of all, it has a great theme that makes the book hang together. It's not just a random assortment of monsters, it's a toolbox for running a whole infernally based campaign. Second, the design is rock solid. Many of the d20 stuff that's appearing is being written by people with a sketchy knowledge of the actual rules. You can rest assured that these monsters are properly designed and carefully edited. Third, the art is simply terrific. The interior illos were done by 3E concept artist Sam Wood, Gamma World illustrator Raven Mimura, and Cthulhu madman Toren Atkinson.

What would you say makes your demons/devils/evil outsiders different from the standard WotC ones?

Devils in D&D have always been high level opponents for the most part. I wanted to create a book full of monsters with CRs from 1/2 to 24, so DMs could have devils to throw at their party at every level. The 3E devils also maintained the "everything plus the kitchen sink" design of their 1E counterparts. I wanted to create devils that had a strong theme, and powers related to that theme. This gives them strong identity and makes them easier to run for DMs.



Are the creatures within new, or have any been seen before in D&D or it's previous incarnations?

They are all new, but I did keep D&D old timers in mind. For instance, *Monster Manual II* had a list of noble devils that were never stat'd up. I took many names from that list and brought them back to the game with full write-ups and stats.

Which is your favourite, and why? Can you tell us a little about it?

It might be the Oubliette, because it's so foul. The Oubliette is a living prison. Basically, there are some champions of good that are perpetual thorns in the side of Hell. However, if they are killed, their souls will go to Heaven and that's clearly no good from Asmodeus' POV. Oubliettes subdue these champions and attach their heads to a tendril that is like a Hellish life support system. This keeps the good soul anchored to the flesh until the Oubliette is killed, denying it to Heaven for untold millennia. Mmmmmm, evil....

I wanted to create devils that had a strong theme, and powers related to that theme. This gives them strong identity and makes them easier to run for DMs.

Could you give me any pointers on creating cool fiends?

Basically, you need a starting point, a hook of some kind. For example, I had the artists for *Legions of Hell* sketch up evil looking devils before I started writing. I was able to look at a great illo and then decide how to best make that a cool D&D monster. Granted, that's an unusual case, but other things work just as well. You may decide you want an outsider with a particular CR to fight your party, or you might want a monster based around an interesting power (like the ethereal marauder). I also can't overstate the value of research. There's a world of ideas out there. Once you've got your hook to hang the creature on, you start the design process. As you make each decision, you ask yourself how that fits into your goals for that monster. Your basic idea then guides your design choices and when you are done, you've got an interesting monster that hangs together.

You have a large bibliography at the back of the book. Exactly how much research was undertaken?

Well, I had done several months worth of research when designing the *Guide to Hell* for AD&D, so I was able to build on that. When writing up the noble devils in particular, I would be sitting on the couch with six reference books arrayed about me. The D&D pattern for devils was well established and I wanted this book to fit in seamlessly with that. It was actually pretty amusing to find out that I was using many of the same sources that Gygax and company must have used in the

70s. That chart in MM2 I mentioned, for instance, tells you how many legions each of those devils commanded. That info comes straight out of real occult books.

At the start of the book, you provide a basic overview of Hell, and the Lords that rule it. Will future products expand on this? And how does this fit in with the older *Guide to Hell*?

We may expand on this, but I'm trying to keep this material in line with the classic D&D Hell. I want this material easy to integrate into any D&D game.

What about the Lords of Hell themselves? I notice that they are very briefly dealt with - are you able to detail these beings or are there copyright issues involved?

I can use names that come from real mythology, but not names that are WotC copyrights. So Asmodeus is fair game, but Malagard is not. My list of the Lords of Hell maps very closely to that in *Guide to Hell*, but there are differences. Prince Levistus, for instance, didn't have much character, but I replaced him with Leviathan, who I think is much cooler.

The other issue is that the rules do not yet exist in the d20 canon to properly stat up such powerful beings. At the very least, we'll need the Epic Level Handbook before we can do justice to the Lords of Hell.

If I read your post correctly, you hinted in the d20 Publishers forum that you might be covering the Abyss in a similar manner?

That's the plan. Look out, Orcus!

What else can we expect to see from Green Ronin in the coming months?

Following hot on the heels of *Legions of Hell* is *Hell in Freeport*, a meaty adventure co-authored by the very same Jim Bishop mentioned above. It's a tough adventure for 10th level characters that combines two great tastes: Freeport and Hell. Later in the year we've got the penultimate Freeport book: *Secrets of Freeport*. This will be a 128 page sourcebook with a fold out colour city map. It should be very nice.



We're taking a short break from d20 in August for the Spaceship Zero RPG, a 50s style sci-fi extravaganza. If you like space opera and Cthulhu, this is the game for you. Check www.spaceshipzero.com and our website for more info.

We'll be announcing some other exciting projects very soon. I can say that we've contracted Steve Perrin, co- designer of the classic Runequest RPG, to write a sourcebook for us called the *Monster Slayer's Handbook*. More info on that as it develops.

The other issue is that the rules do not yet exist in the d20 canon to properly stat up such powerful beings. At the very least, we'll need the Epic Level Handbook before we can do justice to the Lords of Hell.

Anything planned for GenCon?

Oh yes, we'll be there in full force. Our booth will be part of the Wizard's Attic suite, so you can find us there. William Simoni and Rob Toth, authors of *Madness* and *Terror in Freeport* respectively, will be running a Freeport tournament adventure (look for that in the onsite book). Ork co-author "Crazy" Todd Miller will also be running Ork demos throughout the show.

Punk?

Yes, it's true, I'm a punk, and not the kind you find in prison. And no, the irony of working for WotC is not lost on me. However, I keep the Do It Yourself ethic alive with Green Ronin.

If you had to pick your favourite three d20 products, produced by neither Wizards or Green Ronin, which would you choose?

Hmmm, tough question. I have not yet gotten a d20 product that has blown me away. Of the ones I have looked at I like *Last Days of Constantinople* (they may have messed up the stats, but the historical info was great), *Belly of the Beast* (an interesting change of pace from the traditional dungeon bash), and maybe *Relics and Rituals* (enough good stuff to make it worthwhile).

Are you looking forward to anything in particular?

Yes, I'm very much looking forward to *Fields of Blood*, Eden's mass combat book. I know George Vasilakos is a big minis guy, and I'm curious to see how he handles the issues that we have tangled with while developing *Chainmail* at WotC.

Yes, it's true, I'm a punk, and not the kind you find in prison. And no, the irony of working for WotC is not lost on me. However, I keep the Do It Yourself ethic alive with Green Ronin.

As you are at WotC as well as Green Ronin, do you have a few hints about *Tooth & Claw* that you can share with us?

I wasn't involved in the playtesting of that book, I'm afraid. It's as big a mystery to me as to you!

How do you like things at WotC since you moved from RPGs to Miniatures?

WotC is always a roller coaster. High highs, low lows. You just need to try to do good work and keep moving forward.

The d20 market is suffering from something of a glut of adventures and other products at the moment. What do you think will happen in the marketplace, long term? Will different publishers begin to settle into different niches?

In the long term, d20 will stop being profitable for just anybody. Right now, even the worst d20 products make more money than the best small press material. That will likely change as more and more d20 companies pop up. Some companies will no doubt find a niche and stick with it. My plan is to provide a nice mix of products that are broadly appealing to D&D players.

Any predictions for the ENnies?

I can't even begin to guess. I've seen people gush about products I find embarrassingly amateurish, so I'm going to leave this one for the voting public. As it should be.

I should also remind people to vote in the Origins Awards (www.originsawards.com). *Death in Freeport* is up for Best Role-playing Adventure and I've also got a short story (*Mormacar's Lament*) I wrote for Games Workshop up in the Best Game Related Short Work category.

Green Ronin appreciates your readers' consideration for the ENnies and the Origins Awards.

I've seen people gush about products I find embarrassingly amateurish, so I'm going to leave this one for the voting public.

Anything else you'd like to add before we finish?

Just a big thank you for all the fans that have made Green Ronin a rousing success. I couldn't be more happy.

Thanks for your time!

Thank you!



The Swords of Templemount

By Phillippe Anders

Prelude

The Dream came again, unbidden and unwanted. It caused pain, and even terror, in a mind that was unused to either. Waves of silvery light pounded against the demented consciousness, twisting, probing and searing! The Dreamer thrashed wildly, tearing the blackcloth coverings that festooned the massive basalt bed in the centre of its darkened sleeping chamber. In one corner of the room, hung with grim tapestries woven from human hair and depicting unimaginably cruel scenes torture and worse, lay the blasted remains of its latest lover. Empty eye sockets leered at the Dreamer and cracked teeth grinned a foolish grin, locked in an eternal eerie smile. The Dreamer fought through the silvery strands of light, recoiling in pain each time one touched its flesh. It growled in frustration at its inability to reach the source of its agony and lashed out at the beams of light. Slowly it made headway, although the pain increased with each halting step. Finally, just when the Dreamer felt that the impossibly bright light would tear the very skin from its bones, it found the source of the light. It stood for a minute, surrounded by a pulsating storm of silver light and stared in disbelief. "No-o-o-o!" It cried in fury and despair, focusing on the object of its agony. The Dreamer sat upright in the ruins of its bed, chest heaving and rivers of perspiration running down its body. It glanced quickly about the room, but nothing was amiss. Still, the pain of the silvery light lingered in the Dreamer's limbs and it felt as if it had been stretched on the wrack to the breaking point. An unholy howl burst from the Dreamer's mouth and echoed through the fetid halls of its dwelling. Dark and misshapen creatures that roamed the hallways froze in their tracks and trembled in fear. Far below the bedchamber, nameless and forgotten wretches, manacled to walls and laying in their own filth, quaked anew with fresh terror. The Dreamer had awakened!



Chapter One – The Road to Egran

Rain.

It fell in great slashing sheets, driven sideways by the wind blowing in off the Sul Myn. The silver birch and maple trees that lined the Grey Lord's High Road swayed drunkenly, like mead-crazed country folk dancing the Kercim Reel. Past the tree line, a patchwork of fields stretched off into the distance in all directions, laden with summer wheat, rye and barley. On a clear day, the massive snow-capped peaks of the Oradal

Rashad were visible on the western horizon. This day, however, the storm clouds pulled a gray veil across the land and nothing more than half-a-league distant could be seen. "High road indeed, " Marcus mumbled crossly, pulling his sodden cloak tightly about his shivering frame.

Little could be seen of the cross young man. A voluminous gray cloak, homespun from local wool, flowed from his broad shoulders and over the flanks of the small roan gelding he sat atop. Underneath the cowl, a shock of straw-colored hair and rather plain, square-jawed face were visible. Hazel eyes, bright with intelligence, blinked repeatedly to shunt the rain away. Several days of stubble graced his chin and the nose the surmounted his thin lips had been broken at least once. The tip of a plain black leather scabbard, worn yet serviceable, protruded from the expanse of the cloak by his left leg. The feet thrust through the stirrups of the old cavalry saddle were clad in calf-high boots of brown leather and dark blue leggings disappeared into the gray of the cloak. Gloved hands gripped the double reins from the roan's bridle, resting lightly on the saddle's pommel. The gelding, sensing his rider's discomfort, turned his head and whickered softly.

"I know, Fleet, it is going to be a very long day," Marcus sighed, patting the horse on its neck.

The steady rain turned the stone ribbon that wound from Kercim to Egran into a muddy quagmire and hand's breadth or more of murky water covered the road completely. Resigned to a long, cold and wet ride, Marcus retreated mentally, focusing his mind on the roaring fire and warm spiced wine that awaited him in a tavern somewhere ahead. His mind conjured up an imaginary roast fowl, covered in gravy, accompanied by sweet potatoes, leeks and a glass of Kercim Special Reserve.

His thoughts wandered, recalling the last time that such a fine potable had passed his lips. It was nearly a fortnight before and his mood then was as dark as the sky he currently rode under. He and his father were arguing, again. The heated conversation came back to him in a rush.

"Father, my duty and my life are here, not in some damnable fortress, forsaken by men and the gods alike!" Marcus complained, sitting forward in his over-stuffed chair and setting his empty wineglass on the small end table next to his seat.

His father, pacing in front of the hearth of the small, yet well-appointed study they occupied, whirled and answered in a stern voice, "We have had this discussion a dozen times and I tire of it! I am master of this house and this family - you will abide my wishes in this matter!"

An angry retort formed on Marcus' lips, but he held it for a moment and regarded the man standing two paces from him, clinched fists resting on hips and an unyielding set to his square jaw. Gildas Belisarian was a hand's breadth shorter than his son, but had the broad shoulders, thick wrists and strong hands of a trained swordsman. A slight thickening around the midsection showed that the elder Belisarian was not as active as he had once

been and thinning blonde hair crowned his pate. Even when standing still, he favored his right leg, left permanently disfigured by a fiend's blade many seasons ago. His father wore a gray half-cape and matching doublet with silver brocade. Deep blue trousers disappeared into ankle-high boots made of gray calfskin. An ornate silver belt and heavily jeweled dirk completed the outfit. Marcus knew that the forced inactivity caused by the old wound angered his father, since the crippled limb often buckled at inopportune times. "Of course," he thought wryly, a quick, humorless smile touching his mouth, "many things anger my father these days." Gildas, taking his son's expression as impertinence, inhaled sharply, his visage darkening further. His flushed face made the puckered scar that ran from the middle of his forehead, across his left eye socket and down to the left corner of his mouth even more prominent. He was not wearing his customary eye patch this night, so the milky white deadness of his left eye contrasted sharply with the reddish-purple hue of the angry scar, another permanent memento of his years in the service of the Lord Protector.

"For eight generations, every male in our family has traveled to the Templemount to lay his sword at the feet of the Lord Protector and pledge his honor and two years of his life in defense of the Kessel," his father said, fighting to control his irritation. "I will not permit that tradition of service to be broken by my only son because he would rather swill wine, cast dice and chase after plump merchants daughters!"

Marcus stood abruptly, jostling the table and sending his wineglass tumbling to the polished stone floor, where it shattered into countless pieces. "Father," Marcus began, "I..."

"You what?" His father said in a low, dangerous voice, his good eye narrowing as he stepped forward to stand directly in front of his son. "You will sit and you will hold your tongue and you will listen to what I have to say. Do you understand?"

There was a timbre to his father's voice that Marcus had never heard before and it froze his reply deep in his throat. Nodding mutely, Marcus shrank back into the soft coziness of the armchair.

Clasping his hands behind his back and resuming his pacing, his father continued, "I know the sentiments that run throughout Kercim and the rest of the Kessel, for that matter. You and your friends think that the Strongholds of the Patrons are very far away and that they have kept the fiends from advancing for a thousand years and will do so for a thousand more. I hear my fellow merchants complain bitterly about providing a fifth part of their goods for the annual levy and proudly proclaim that their sons will not go to give service. Unfortunately, that attitude could well be our ruin for every year, fewer and fewer volunteers travel to the Templemount or the Forge or even to dread Skaukator. And each season, fewer and fewer defenders are available to match the Fiends." Gildas paused for a moment and slowly swept his arm in a slow arc. Marcus' gaze followed, stopping briefly on the carved mahogany writing desk, inlaid with ivory and festooned with gilt patterns and its matching chair, the

rich burgundy and royal blue velvet wall hangings and polished silver wall sconces. "All of this comes at a price, Marcus," His father said evenly. "Enough people of good heart must be willing to pay that price or all that you see here in this room and on the street outside and even within the walls of Kercim and beyond are forfeit! The memories of men are short and the Strongholds have protected the Kessel and the lands beyond for a millennium. Few of the common folk have ever seen a fiend and not one a hundred of the corpulent merchants that call our city home know what horror the fiends bring with them – they hear the tales, but they do not believe."

"Since the time of Corvis Belisarian, over 150 winters ago, our family has paid that price! Not one in two of those that have pledged their service have returned and many of those that returned carried permanent reminders of their sacrifice, much as I do. I have seen what terror the fiends are capable of and tremble to think about them released upon my friends and neighbors. I have watched as they tore armored warriors asunder and seen the pitiful remains of young girls ravaged by their vileness. Would you consign your sisters to such a fate by failing to follow your duty?" A brief image of Brethia and Alowyn in the clutches of the Fiends his father had often described caused Marcus to shudder involuntarily. Gildas allowed his words to sink in for several moments before continuing.

"Do you truly think that I want to send my only son away, perhaps to die under the claws or teeth or fell magic of our enemies? Both of my own brothers fell in the service of the Lord Protector and they had no sons. I am loath to commit the last male of our line to such a venture - but I will not stand as a hypocrite, like so many of our neighbors. You must do this Marcus, for the honor of our family and for the life of the Kessel."

His father fell silent, regarded Marcus for a moment, then turned and extended his hands toward the hearth, seeking to pull warmth from the blazing fire. Without looking at Marcus, he said quietly, "Your grandfather and I had this same discussion in this very same chamber many, many winters ago. I felt much the same as you. My older brother Sextus had been killed guarding one of the air barges that ferries supplies to the Strongholds a season before my twenty-first name day. I was in love with a beautiful young lady and the last thing in the entire world I wanted was to follow the will of my father and the tradition of our family, but in the end, I went and I served. You must as well."

Marcus stared at his father's form in front of the hearth. Silhouetted by the firelight, Gildas Belisarian cast a long shadow across the flagstone floor of the study and onto the far wall. "It has always been so," he thought wearily. "He has ever cast his shadow over all he touches. It is always about duty and honor and commitment. He will not yield on this, so I must, if there is ever to be peace between us."

"I will do this thing, Father," Marcus sighed in a barely audible whisper, capitulation evident in his voice. "I will travel to Templemount and lay my sword at the feet of the Lord Protector,

as you command. I will not dishonor our house or our name."

Gildas was silent for a long moment, and then he squared his shoulders, stepped toward the hearth and carefully retrieved the large sword in the plain black scabbard that hung there. He slowly turned and, cradling the sword in his strong hands, limped over to stand before his son. His good eye glistened with moisture as it searched Marcus' face, probing intently. Then his face softened and he slowly shook his head.

"I will travel to Templemount and lay my sword at the feet of the Lord Protector, as you command. I will not dishonor our house or our name."

"Nay, my son. You will not lay your blade before the Lord Protector. It is serviceable enough. You will take Herzsilber with you when you travel to the Templemount, so that the Lord Protector may know you."

"F-f-father, I cannot..." Marcus stammered, trailing off as his father thrust the sheathed blade forward. "She is your sword."

"Herzsilber, or 'Silverheart' in the Old Tongue was given to Corvis Belisarian by the Lord Protector himself, in honor of his service. She has been borne by the firstborn of each generation. She passed to me upon Sextus' death and served me faithfully for many seasons. I now pass her on to you to aid you in your duty."

Marcus took the sword from his father and slowly drew that blade from its scabbard and laid it across his knees. The keen weapon boasted more than two paces and more of mirror-bright edge. Inlaid sapphires graced the cross guard, which was slightly upswept at the ends. The silver-wrapped hilt was long enough for the sword to be easily wielded with one hand or two. The pommel was carved with the likeness of four winged creatures, arms outstretched over their heads. Small sapphires were inset to serve as eyes and their delicate hands clasped a single, well-cut stone. When he was young, his father told him that the winged creatures represented Celestials, one-time servants of the Dying Gods and implacable foes of the Fiends.

His examination of the blade was interrupted when a single tear splashed onto center of the sword. Marcus' eyes widened in amazement as the shining blade drank the tear in, leaving nary a trace. He glanced up as his father, who stood above him with a solitary tear track running down the unblemished side of his face. Gildas Belisarian silently reached out with his right hand, grasped his son's left shoulder and gave it a firm, almost desperate squeeze. He then turned without saying a word and hobbled from the study, gray half-cape fluttering behind him. Marcus sat in the comfortable, overstuffed armchair with the naked blade across his knees for a very long time, lost in thought. The fire burned down to smoldering embers and the first hint of dawn

played across Kercim and the Sul Myn before he finally roused himself. Within the week he had quietly taken his leave of his father, his sisters and his friends and departed for Egran – somber and subdued.



A startled snort from Fleet shook him from his reverie. A high-pitched scream of terror and pain, surprisingly close, echoed in his ears. Somewhere, just ahead, a horse was dying!

"By the Dying Gods, this day just keeps getting better!" Marcus spat as he flung his cloak back and freed his sword from its scabbard with a smooth, practiced movement. The blade rang as it cleared the sheath, a bright clear sound that seemed strangely out of place, given the dreariness of the day. Curiously, Marcus found his spirits lifting as the ringing faded.

A light touch of his heels and the prancing roan leapt away, head up and ears forward. Rounding a slight bend in the road, the pair soon saw a large, gaudily painted wagon with an enclosed top lying on its side, upside wheels spinning lazily. A team of chestnut-colored draft horses thrashed feebly in their traces, blood flowing from numerous wounds. A dozen small, reddish creatures, cackling and hooting, swarmed around the wagon, busily tearing off planks and hurling them aside. Marcus reined Fleet in for a moment, stunned.

Many a night as a youth, he had fallen asleep in his father's lap as the elder Belisarian regaled his son with stories of bravery and despair. Recognition hammered against his disbelieving mind. There was no mistaking these creatures – his father's descriptions had been clear enough.

"Fiends," he whispered under his breath, "here?"

Then another scream, different in tone, tenor and origin from the first, rose from the wreck. The back door of the prone wagon flew open and a slender form, wearing a white shift and clutching a leather bag, stumbled from the innards of the wagon and ran for the cover of the woods, bare feet splashing in the water and long red hair trailing behind. Guttural calls, low and angry, issued from one of the fiends and four or five leapt in pursuit of the fleeing figure. Fleet was moving even before Marcus dug his heels in, angling to intercept. As he neared the fiends, which were rapidly closing the distance with their frantically fleeing quarry, he saw them more clearly.



No more than two paces tall, with wickedly clawed hands and long, thin tails covered in spikes, they loped forward on all fours, blue tongues lolling out of mouths filled with razor-sharp teeth. They wore no clothes and bore no visible weapons, although their natural armament looked quite formidable. The nasty little creatures were so intent on their prey that they failed to notice Marcus and Fleet until horse and rider plunged into their midst.

"Fiends," he whispered under his breath, "here?"

The nimble roan put his shoulder into one and then another fiend, knocking them prone on the muddy ground. The bright steel of Marcus' blade flashed down, shearing completely through the juncture of the neck and right shoulder of a third in a spray of greenish ichor and it howled in agony. "At least they bleed," Marcus thought grimly as they continued through the close packed fiends.

Fleet sprang clear and Marcus, using a light hand and knee pressure, wheeled the gelding around to make another pass. The two flattened by Fleet sat up groggily, shaking their heads. A third stopped for a moment, looking from fleeing human to the mounted Marcus and back again, then hooted and continued its pursuit. The fourth crouched down, tail whipping back and forth like that of an agitated cat and hissed loudly. Marcus was vaguely aware of answering hisses from the direction of the wagon, but concentrated on the enemies at hand. He and Fleet charged forward again, aiming for the cluster of three.

When they approached within ten paces, the crouching fiend launched itself at Marcus with a tremendous leap. Taken by surprise, Marcus was barely able to twist aside and interpose his sword before the talons and teeth reached him. The tip of the blade caught the fiend just below the breastbone and the keen steel punched through the scaly hide of the fiend, tearing through it innards and killing it instantly. The fiend's dead body crashed into Marcus and the momentum knocked him from Fleet's back. Both man and fiend fell heavily

to the ground and the concussion knocked the wind from Marcus' lungs.

He lay on his back, vainly gasping for air like a fish removed from its pond. He was dimly aware that the two fiends initially stunned by his first charge were advancing on him and others were not far behind. His wildly fumbling hand found the hilt of his sword, but his body refused to obey his frantic mental command to breathe. He saw a fiend spring into the air out of the corner of his eye and tensed involuntarily, waiting for the claws and teeth to sink into his flesh. Then, a flashing hoof met the fiend in mid-leap, splitting its head with a sound akin to an overripe melon being hit with a sledgehammer! Fleet stood over his fallen master, snorting and pawing the torn-up earth, as if daring the other fiend to try the same thing. Stupidly it did, with similar results, although the roan received a nasty gash on the shoulder while warding Marcus from another attack.

Fighting through his pain, Marcus rolled to his knees and slowly stood on unsteady legs. The unwelcome sight of seven more fiends advancing from the ruin of the wagon greeted him. He quickly gauged his chances of remounting before the savage creatures were upon and just as quickly dismissed the notion. He assumed a defensive stance, turning his body sideways to present a smaller target and hefted his blade in both hands, waiting. Suddenly, he was dimly aware of somebody standing to his right. He saw white cloth, red hair and a dagger dripping with fiend ichor out of his peripheral vision. Then all of his attention was focused on the fiends leaping towards him.

"May the Lord of Blades steel my arm," he whispered, bracing himself for their impact.

As the fiends hurtled through the air, closing the distance separating them with blinding speed, the figure next to him shouted harsh words in a strange language and traced an invisible symbol through the air with the bloody dagger. A bluish-white translucent circle, three or four paces across formed in mid-air between the pair and the fiends. Marcus felt unnatural cold radiating from the circle, then the dagger flashed down and the circle shattered, sending dozens of icy shards slicing through the air and into the fiends. Several of them were torn asunder and the rest dropped heavily to the ground, two or three paces short of their intended mark. Marcus shook the rain from his eyes, momentarily unable to comprehend his good fortune, then charged into the midst of the stunned fiends, striking right and left.

Several heartbeats later, he stood in the center of a ring of crumpled bodies, chest heaving from exertion. Blood trickled slowly from a bite wound on his right calf where a dying fiend latched onto him as he pinned to the ground and severed its spine. All of the fiends lay still, their greenish blood soaking into the mud. He turned slowly and looked behind him, fully focusing on the person in white for the first time. The rain-soaked shift,

now nearly transparent, clearly revealed a woman.

...the slender woman was barefoot and clad in nothing but the wet undergarment that ended halfway down her very white thighs.

Easily three handbreadths shorter than he was, the slender woman was barefoot and clad in nothing but the wet undergarment that ended halfway down her very white thighs. Her delicate features – narrow chin, high cheekbones adorned with faint freckles and small, slightly upturned nose – was partially hidden by the unkempt mane of red hair. Bold blue eyes regarded him frankly and a small half-smile perched on her full lips. She still clutched a well-made dagger in her left hand and a large brown leather pouch in her right.

"Thank you for rescuing me, sir," she said in a soft musical voice.

Marcus wasn't sure he liked her emphasis on the word 'rescuing' and couldn't tell if she was sincere or if she was mocking him. She transferred the dagger to her right hand and held out her left, which ended in long delicate fingers adorned by several rings.

"My name is Gabriella, of House Malvai. Who, may I be so bold as to ask, are you?" she purred, the mischievous look never leaving her face.

"This one," Marcus silently thought, "is going to be trouble!"



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Story Craft

By Ryan Boell

Number 1 - Encounters: Random Riots or Planned Peacefully?



You came here before me with a mission. A Purpose. You want to know how to run great role-play sessions and not having to focus on heavy combat. If not, you may leave. I'll wait.

For those that are still with me, forget everything you know about the concept of the 3rd edition / d20 phenomenon. Well, not the rules, silly, but the 'fact' that it is dungeon crawl game. It doesn't have to be and I'll show you how to make it fun for the fighters, non-lethal for the mages, and fun for you and the players. I will be using my Players as examples for they are in my campaign: *Sasha, Arkemedes, Jamisia, Vaughn, Quinn, Levi, Roland, Samiel and Lilandra*.

Take whatever setting you are using:

Greyhawk, Ravenloft, Scared Lands. I'm using my own homebrew world of **Ulethelid**.

Let me give you an excerpt from my story hour - *A Light In The Darke*. It is split up into chapters:

Once upon a time on a world known as Ulethelid, there were many nations and countries trying to live their lives peacefully. Ulethelid had one problem. For seven months of the year, it was totally dark with the moon, Lunarius, guiding them through the Long Night. The other half of the year, the sun Alhoon guided them through the Long Day.

There are about 9 to 12 continents each with a name and 'personality.' I have come up with 5 dark secrets for each nation and stuck them in my black box so that I may draw a secret when I need a major plot hook if I'm running out. But, as I was saying, take whatever setting you are using and get a feel for it. Make sure you know what continents there are, what kind of secrets your world can hold, examine and feel the world you are in and your players will be adventuring in.

Go and get your DMG. On the front cover I want you to write this phrase: Create Only What You Need.

Now, let's see what I have in the nation my players started in. LiNeer'Div has 2 forests (the Mo'Bri and the Enigma), the Tranquil Plains, the Webbed Woods and the Plains. OK have you got your random encounter charts? Throw them out. Yes, you heard me - throw them out. Why? Well, why make them random? You can roll but you can speed up the game a lot quicker by passing a lot of that up. Want a 'random encounter' on the way to a city? Have it planned. Don't tell your players, though, as they might object to this

new style. Roll a couple of dice, act like you are searching for something and those Orc raiders you wanted to attack instead of some mangy wolves can!

Now, what I do is keep a list of the type of monsters I want a specific kingdom or nation to have (I have the *Creature Collection*, *Monsters of Faerûn* and the *Monster Manual*. I will be getting *Creature Collection II: Dark Menagerie*, so as you can see I have LOTS of options). This makes it easier when I plan my encounters. See? There's that phrase again. Planned Encounters. What does it mean and why are they better than Random Encounters?

Well-planned encounters make it easier on the DM. Say you have a nation that's so large you have over 50 different types of monsters as 'possible encounters.' Great. So rather than waste precious time flipping back and forth, trying to find monster stats and quickly rolling their HP, or writing their HP down several times on a sheet of paper, or spending 2 days typing up a random encounter sheet you may never need again, a planned encounter gives you the ability to allow the PCs to fight the creature but also missed spot checks mean they could bypass each other all together. You will also have the names, stats and all the pertinent information written down for the encounter you wanted anyway instead of a random one.



Example - Random

Sasha, Jamisia, Arkemedes and Vaughn are walking through the desert nation of Figaro. *Hrm they have walked 3 miles. They should have an encounter about now. Ill check my random encounter table, and roll a d8 (as I have 8 creatures that wander the deserts at night (they are 3 months into the Long Night). I roll a Stinger (from the Monsters of Faerûn book). Hrm. They can take this. So they walk and walk and walk and BAM! Spot-checks please? * Roll roll * Sasha and Jamisia, you see in about 60 ft ahead a creature with dark skin, a mans' body from the waist up and a scorpion from the waist down. Vaughn and Arkemedes, you see nothing. He appears to have a ponytail. Everyone make spot checks please * roll roll * ok he doesn't notice you. Sasha walks up to him and shakes his hand? * Gulp * uhhhhh ok. He looks at you and seems thoroughly unimpressed ...* See how plain and boring that is? You are struggling for this information, to feel the creatures' motives. How about this?

Example – Planned

Sasha, Jamisia, Arkemedes and Vaughn are walking through the desert nation of Figaro. *Spot-checks please? * Roll roll * Sasha and Jamisia, you see in about 60 ft ahead a creature with dark skin, a mans body from the waist up and a scorpion from the waist down. Vaughn and Arkemedes, you see nothing. He*



appears to have a ponytail. * roll roll * ok he doesn't notice you. Sasha walks up to him and shakes his hand? Ok. He looks at you and seems to chuckle. "Why hello little girl. Why do you walk alone in the desert?" Spot check please, Sasha. Religion. 19? Ok you notice the symbol for Odin on him. You say you don't want to fight? He says "Ah well I don't either but you would make a wonderful snack. If you fight me fairly I will let you pass, if not, then I get one of you for dinner!"



See? You can now see that he is religious, and will keep his word as a lawful evil creature. You can add more depth, more of a reason then just cannon fodder or filler. Make it all work with each other and make it all have pizzazz.

When running a Story Heavy game focused primarily on the characters and the story, it's best to have planned encounters and not random ones. The best advice ever given to me I am now passing to you: Go and get your DMG. On the front cover I want you to write this phrase: Create Only What You Need. That's it. If you create more than you need, you will burn out. If you create less, you will be cheating your players of the opportunity to act out in your story.

Next month we will be focusing on creating interesting places and secrets for the world in which you game. Until next month, happy creating and may you all journey peacefully. So email me (angelsboi21@hotmail.com) YOUR interesting world places and I will add some interesting secrets and ideas!

The Asgard Bestiary

By Scott Greene and Erica Balsley

The creators of The Creature Catalog are pleased to present you with a monthly diet of original monsters. This month's theme is 'Water' and you will find here the Draug, the undead spirit of a ship's captain, and the Turtle-Shark, a monstrous hybrid of turtle and...well, shark.

Draug

Medium-Size Undead

Hit Dice: 6d12 (38 hp)

Initiative: +2 (Dex)

Speed: 30 ft, swim 30 ft

AC: 17 (+2 Dex, +5 natural)

Attacks: Cutlass +6 melee; or 2 claws +5 melee

Damage: Cutlass 1d6+3; or claw 1d4+3

Face/Reach: 5 ft by 5 ft/5 ft

Special Qualities: Undead, +2 turn resistance, control ship

Saves: Fort +2, Ref +4, Will +7

Abilities: Str 14, Dex 15, Con —, Int 12, Wis 14, Cha 14

Skills: Balance +8, Climb +7, Hide +6, Intuit Direction +6, Profession (sailor) +10, Listen +9, Move Silently +6, Search +5, Spot +9

Feats: Alertness, Weapon Focus (cutlass)

Climate/Terrain: Any land

Organisation: Solitary or crew (1 draug, 2-8 zombies or skeletons, 2-4 lacedons)

Challenge Rating: 4

Treasure: Standard

Alignment: Always chaotic evil

Advancement: 6-15 HD (Medium-size)

A draug is the vengeful spirit of a ship's captain who died at sea, thus being denied a proper burial. If an entire ship sinks with a loss of all hands, the ship itself and its entire crew may return as ghostly wanderers.

A draug looks as it did in life, wearing the same clothes and bearing the same possessions it held at the moment of death. It is lean and ravaged by decay with bits of bone showing beneath waterlogged blue-green rotting flesh. Its clothes hang in tatters, and its weapons are pitted and rusted.

Combat

Draugs are jealous of the living, and will try as they can to bring death and misfortune to them. They have been known to suddenly appear in a sea mist and climb aboard the ships of the living.

A draug's favoured form of attack is with its cutlass, though if disarmed it will use its claws to attempt to grapple the crew and leap back into the waves to drown the unfortunate victim.

Call Storm (Su): Once per day, a draug can summon inclement weather to harass his foes.

This ability functions as the *control weather* spell cast by a 6th-level sorcerer, but the effect is felt immediately (that is, there is not a 10 minute delay as the weather gradually changes).



Control Ship (Su): The draug captain has full control over the direction of his vessel (wind notwithstanding) so long as he remains at the wheel or within 20 feet of his helmsman. Should he leave this area, the ship will meander in a random direction until the captain regains control. A draug also imbues his ship with special powers (see Draug Ships below).

Undead: Immune to mind-influencing effects, sleep, poison, paralysis, stunning, and disease. Not subject to critical hits, subdual damage, ability damage, energy drain, or death from massive damage. Undead have darkvision to a range of 60 feet.

Cutlass: (from the *Forgotten Realms Campaign Book*). Small slashing and piercing weapon, cost 15 gp, damage 1d6, critical 19-20/x2, weight 3 lb.

A draug often acts as a death token, rising out of the sea and staring at or pointing a bony finger at a sailor who is fated to drown.

Draug Society

The arrival of a draug is often taken as a death portent, for even if they do not attack some dire circumstance is likely to befall the witness. A draug often acts as a death token, rising out of the sea and staring at or pointing a bony finger at a sailor who is fated to drown.

Draug Ships

When a ship sinks beneath the waters, it and its entire crew may return as ghostly wanderers, especially if the captain and crew had a less than scrupulous profession (such as piracy). A sunken ship of this nature may undergo a strange transformation from the

negative energy and evil surrounding it. When this happens, the ship rises from the deep, piloted by a draug and manned by zombies, lacedons, and skeletons. The ship will appear as it was at the time it sunk with tattered sails and seaweed-draped decks.

When a draug is at the helm, its "ghost ship" gains the following powers.

Buoyancy (Su): Regardless of the condition of the hull, a draug ship will always remain afloat in any weather conditions. It is not affected by winds of any kind, and can even sail against gale-force winds. Strong waves can toss it about, but will never capsize the ship.

Invulnerable to Fire (Ex): A draug ship is so waterlogged and suffused with negative energy that it is completely immune to fire and will not burn.

Flight (Su): A draug captain can cause his vessel to completely leave the water and take to the air as long as he remains on board. This spell operates like the spell *fly* as cast by a sorcerer with a level equal to the captain's hit dice.

Turtle Shark

Huge Beast (Aquatic, Reptilian)

Hit Dice: 6d10+30 (65 hp)

Initiative: +3 (Dex)

Speed: 10 ft., swim 40 ft.

AC: 21 (-2 size, +3 Dex, +10 natural)

Attacks: Bite +10 melee or slam +10 melee

Damage: Bite 2d6+8 or slam 1d6+4

Face/Reach: 10 ft. by 10 ft./10 ft.

Special Attacks: Snatch, swallow whole, capsize

Special Qualities: Shell

Saves: Fort +10, Ref +8, Will +2

Abilities: Str 26, Dex 16, Con 21, Int 2, Wis 10, Cha 8

Skills: Spot +3, Swim +19*

Climate/Terrain: Any aquatic

Organisation: Solitary or pair

Challenge Rating: 4

Treasure: None

Alignment: Always neutral

Advancement: 7-12HD (Huge), 13-18HD (Colossal)

"We saw it, aye. Came about to us and lay off the port bow, large as life. Shell like a reef she had, nearly as big itself as our vessel. A blow from its huge fin sent poor Jorin overboard and t'his doom in the belly o' that thing!" – Captain Thom Caermon

A turtle-shark is a giant hybrid animal, which many think is a product of the same twisted magic that created the owlbear.

From a distance a turtle-shark resembles a giant snapping turtle. It has a peaked and craggy shell form which protrude four long fins and its scowling head at the end of a long neck. However, closer inspection reveals irrefutably shark-like features. The turtle-shark has round, black eyes and a gaping

maw filled with rows of razor sharp teeth. Much like a shark's, these teeth constantly replace themselves throughout the centuries-long life of the turtle shark.

Combat

Turtle sharks surprise many foes with their quickness in the water. Many assume that they are as slow as their other shelled kin, and underestimate the shark-like speed. Like a shark a turtle shark will attack nearly anything it can reach, especially so if there is blood or activity in the water.

Snatch (Ex): A turtle shark that hits with a bite attack attempts to start a grapple as a free action without provoking an attack of opportunity. If it gets a hold on a creature three or more sizes smaller, it seizes the creature with its mouth and automatically deal bite damage each round. If it does not move and takes no other action in combat, it deals double bite damage to the snatched creature. The turtle shark can drop a creature it has snatched as a free action.

Swallow Whole (Ex): A turtle shark can try to swallow a Small or smaller opponent that it has previously seized by making a successful grapple check. The swallowed creature takes 2d8+8 points of crushing damage per round plus 6 points of acid damage from the turtle shark's gizzard. A swallowed creature can cut its way out by using claws or a Small or Tiny slashing weapon to deal 20 points of damage to the gizzard (AC 20). Once the creature exits, muscular action closes the hold; another swallowed opponent must again cut its own way out. The turtle shark's gizzard can hold four Small, eight Tiny, sixteen Diminutive, or thirty-two Fine or smaller opponents.

Capsize (Ex): A submerged turtle shark that surfaces under a boat or ship less than 20 feet long capsizes the vessel 95% of the time. It has a 50% chance to capsize a vessel from 20 to 60 feet long, and a 20% chance to capsize one over 60 feet long.

Shell (Ex): If it is severely threatened a turtle-shark can completely withdraw into its shell, leaving it almost completely impervious to attack. When withdrawn, a turtle shark's AC increases to 28.

The Creature Catalog, maintained by Scott Greene and his cohort in crime Erica Balsley, can be found at:

<http://www.rpgplanet.com/dnd3e/creaturecatalog/>

Slayer Sense

By Ryan Boell

"In every generation there is a Chosen One. She alone will stand against the vampires, the demons and the forces of darkness. She is the Slayer."

Welcome to the first instalment of *Slayer Sense*. This column will discuss the running of a D20 system game based around a certain popular TV show. You may have heard of it. There are a massive variety of campaigns that can be run in such a world - from campaigns centred around the Slayer herself, to campaigns that deal with other, more ordinary individuals, heroic in their own way as they battle the evils. From Watcher Operatives to small groups of vigilante demon-hunters, from archaeologists or scholars who seek out the truth behind the demon-infested history of the world, to cults and cabals that deal with the infernal menace, players can adopt a wide variety of roles and play in many kinds of adventure. Before I jump right on in, I would like to say that "all rights are reserved and copyright Mutant Enemy Productions ©1997" and all that legal stuff. We good? We good.

A city that hustles and bustles with the light of day is vandalised and terrorised by the moonlit night. For there are creatures out there that no one knows of.

"Like zombies, werewolves, incubi, succubi, everything you've ever dreaded was under your bed, but told yourself couldn't be by the light of day. They're all real!"
— Rupert Giles, Watcher.

But there is one. She is the Chosen, there to stop the forces of evil. She is the Slayer. Sure, she has friends that help, and even though they can get into trouble, she is always glad for their aid.

Each month we will look at a different aspect of running such a game. We may look at magic rules, creatures, classes or templates. We may discuss magic items, demonology or cosmology.

This month we will take a look at some of the creatures that populate the Buffyverse - the 'forces of darkness' that the Slayer has been chosen to combat. This is a general overview of demonkind Buffy-style; we will go into more detail in later issues.

Chapter 1 Demonkind

Contrary to popular belief, the world did not begin as a paradise. No - it was a dark place and demons made Earth their home, their Hell. In time, they lost their hold on the world as they made way for mortal animals and

humans. All that were left of the Old Ones were certain magicks, creatures and vestiges. They say that the last demon to leave this reality fed off a human and mixed its blood with a human. The soul became infected and the human bit another, and another and another. Now the offspring wait and feed and watch for the Old Ones to return...

Contrary to popular belief, the world did not begin as a paradise. No - it was a dark place and demons made Earth their home, their Hell.

There are half demons who walk among us, who appear human but keep the demonic bloodline strong. Not always evil and not always good, they usually have a purpose, a reason for living and surviving.

The planar set-up of the Buffyverse is something known only to a few scholars. Although various religions exist, none truly represent the ugly reality. Thousands upon thousands of demon dimensions exist, each a hell in its own right. The demons in these dimensions, the 'Old Ones' are mighty beings indeed, and they constantly strive to enter the world through portals such as the Hellmouth or via elaborate summoning rituals. Many of these beings would spell the end of the world as we know it should they gain passage to the world. It is believed that benevolent powers, the 'Powers that Be', exist and that they seek to assist humanity through indirect means - prophecies, visions and the like, but knowledge of such beings is vague at best.



Vampires

The vampires of the Buffyverse are unique creatures indeed. They are the lowliest form of demonkind, the undead. This is an important distinction - unlike traditional D&D vampires, a vampire in this setting is actually a demon. They do not seem to be affected by religious faith as many traditional legends would have you believe (although contact with a cross can

burn them), and possess remarkable regenerative powers, but a stake through the heart or an instant beheading can kill them.

...unlike traditional D&D vampires, a vampire in this setting is actually a demon.

Vampires do not have souls. They are soulless creatures that prey on the living for the blood they need. It keeps them warm and for them blood is life. They mimic humans, but though they may look like the original person, they may talk like him, they may even act like him or share his memories and habits, the original person is gone and only the vampire remains. The body of a human occupied by a demon. Rumour speaks of a *rare* ritual that can be used to give a vampire their soul back.

Vampires are evil and will always remain evil but they retain some vestiges of humanity, demonstrated through their capacity for love and emotion. Although they appear human, as a vampire gets older its demonic visage becomes more apparent; for example Kakistos had cloven hooves and horns and the Master was demonic in appearance. Elder vampires become quite powerful.

Although the lowest form of demonic existence, vampires still appear human and yet possess demonic powers in their blood.



Demons

As mentioned above, vampires are but one form of demon. The variations on demonkind are infinite, as the demon dimensions from which they hail. We will delve into various types of demon in detail in later issues, but for the moment we will take a quick look at some of the notable, unique fiends that have made their mark on our world.

Acathla the Demon

A stone creature of great power. It is said that only the blood of the Chosen can bring him back to life. He was sent forth to swallow the world but a virtuous knight pierced his heart and, as most demons do, he turned to stone. Acathla was buried where neither man nor demon could find him. If the sword is removed by the Chosen, Acathla's mouth will open, swallowing the world and cleanse it of its humanity. The world we know and the demon world will collide, joining them both.

Eyghon the Sleepwalker

A demon that, when possessing the body of the sleeper, induces an incredible high. Recently a group of people (young adults) formed a circle to summon it into a sleepers' body. It possessed one of their friends and they were unable to send it back. Eyghon can only survive in this plane by living in an

unconscious or dead body. Each person who summons Eyghon bears a tattoo called "The Mark of Eyghon". Eyghon will seek after whoever bears the tattoo, tracking them down and killing them.

The Judge

The Judge is a hideous blue creature whose touch, when applied to humans, can burn the humanity out of them, killing them in the process. When the Judge gets stronger he can merely point and burn the humanity from his victims. He is very powerful and no weapon forged by man can kill him. He is hard to destroy. The best way to defeat him is to hack his body to pieces and store those pieces separately.

The Whistler

Not all demons are bad, as the Whistler proves. He is on the side of good and although his curse is to speak in cryptically and in riddles, he is sincere. His fashion sense is not the best, but he is an indispensable font of knowledge. He helps people by giving them a purpose.

Machida

This half-man, half-snake gives riches and desires to those who make sacrifices to him. If sliced in half, he can regenerate.

Der Kinderstood

An invisible assailant, this creature preys solely on children. Der Kinderstood means 'The Child Death' and that is an appropriate name. Dressed like a 19th century undertaker with a twisted white face - almost like a demonic clown with large fangs minus the makeup, his eyeballs extend from their sockets and latch onto the child's forehead. This sucks the life out but the child will appear to have died from sickness. Der Kinderstood can only be seen by someone who is near death.

The Vengeance Demon

The vengeance demon is a mysterious creature. It always takes the form of a young girl who preys on a heartbroken female who has been spurned by love. The demon's powers are activated by a necklace that the demon lends the young woman who then makes a wish. However the demon always twists the wish to fit *her* needs. If the necklace is broken then the wish can be reversed.

Gingerbread Demon

This demon takes a unique form - that of a 7 year-old brother and sister team that plant mental suggestions into others' heads about the dangers of witchcraft and evil. Usually it's the parents who are affected and the teenagers or kids are the targets. It casts illusions on the people near it, spreads its hatred for humans, and lets them kill each other. The brother and sister always show up as Hans and Greta Strauss.



The Gentlemen

There are 7 Gentlemen. They enter a village to hunt and capture the voices of the inhabitants in a small wooden box. No-one can speak or scream. The Gentlemen (who move by hovering a few inches off the ground) need to steal 7 hearts from 7 people in order to survive for another time period. If the 'princess' screams, they are destroyed.

As you can see, there are many demons around in the Buffyverse. You don't have to use these. Use the *Monster Manual*, *Creature Collection*, *Monsters of Faerûn*, *Legions of Hell* and such. Use your imagination. Next issue we will be dissecting the Buffyverse Vampire. It will include an in depth article on the Buffyverse vampires, the new vampire template, a sample vampire and rules on how the Buffyverse vampires work. Till 14, make it Buffy!



The Prestige of Magic

By Ryan Nock

Welcome to The Prestige of Magic. This column present a new prestige class to you each month, written by Ryan 'RangerWickett' Nock. Ryan has developed a reputation within the online D&D community for his well developed and balanced material, and we are very pleased to have him on board.

These prestige classes are all classes that you might expect to find in a book such as 'Tome and Blood'. At the end of the series, we will gather these classes together, along with other rules, feats, skills, spells and items to create an accessory for magic-wielding characters. The first class in this series is the High Sorcerer.

The High Sorcerer

Many spellcasters follow their craft out of interest, necessity, or tradition. For them, magic is enjoyable to study, useful for achieving goals (such as adventuring), or expected of them because of the family or society that raised them. Sometimes among these, yet even more often from outside the traditional fields, come those spellcasters who pursue the arcane arts because they have no other choice. For them, magic is as vital as air is to you or me. They make sorcery part of themselves, letting it course through their veins, flow through their souls, dance through their dreams, and sculpt their lives.

Magic is life for a High Sorcerer. The true wielder of magic understands this and looks down upon those for whom dweomercraft is simply a hobby, a tool, or worst yet considered mundane. He fulfils all his needs through sorcery, eventually disdaining to carry anything nonmagical beyond modest clothing. High sorcerers know what magic truly is. This knowledge is meaningless to anyone else, yet so vital to them that everything else in life is secondary.

Requirements:

Skills: Knowledge (Arcana), 13 ranks
Spellcraft, 13 ranks

Spellcasting: Ability to cast 5th level arcane spells.

Other Requirement: The magi must undergo an ordeal to shed himself of all reliance on his physical body. Wearing no armour, the magi must spend 28 days alone in a wilderness, refusing all aid from others. Aside from simple clothes and spell components, he may bring no non-magical items, not even food. He must use his magic to fulfil all his needs of shelter and food, conjuring his own food or magically killing creatures. The only physical weapon he can bring is a dagger, and even this should only

be used as a tool, not as a weapon. Until he accomplishes this ordeal, he will not have the



confidence and understanding of himself to truly feel sorcery in his blood.

Table: High Sorcerer

Lvl	BAB	Fort	Ref	Will	Special
1	+0	+0	+0	+2	Vows, Magic in the Blood, Low Sorcery, Cantrip Mastery
2	+1	+0	+0	+3	Low Sorcery, Dweomer Mastery
3	+1	+1	+1	+3	Low Sorcery, Magic as the Blood
4	+2	+1	+1	+4	Low Sorcery, Middle Sorcery, Dweomer Mastery
5	+2	+1	+1	+4	Low Sorcery, Magic as the Soul
6	+3	+2	+2	+5	Low Sorcery, Dweomer Mastery
7	+3	+2	+2	+5	Low Sorcery, Greater Cantrip Mastery
8	+4	+2	+2	+6	Low Sorcery, Dweomer Mastery
9	+4	+3	+3	+6	Low Sorcery, High Sorcery
10	+5	+3	+3	+7	True Sorcery, Dweomer Mastery

Hit Dice: d4

Class Skills (and the key ability for each skill): Alchemy (Int), Concentration (Con), Knowledge (arcana) (Int), Scry (Int, exclusive skill), Spellcraft (Int)

Weapon and Armour Proficiency: High Sorcerers are not proficient with any weapons, armour, or shields.

Skill Points at each level: 0 + Int modifier.

Spellcasting:

A High Sorcerer's levels stack with that of one of his existing spellcasting classes for the purposes of caster level, spells per day, and (for spontaneous spellcasters) spells known.

Vows:

A High Sorcerer vows to never use a physical tool, even his own body, when he can accomplish a task through magic. Aside from the simplest of tasks, he will not even lower himself so much as to open a door with his hand, to carry books or supplies in his arms, or to light a candle to brighten a room. He will not bear any non-magical items other than simple clothes and spell components. He can carry magical weapons, but can only use them for their magical properties, never for combat. The only weapon he is able to use for battle, magical or non-magical, is a knife or dagger, and even this he is loath to use except in the most dire circumstances. He does still use simple utensils for eating, and can act more mundanely if courtesy demands, but his love for magic prevents him from wasting his gift. A High Sorcerer who violates this code loses all class abilities until he again undergoes the 28 day ordeal in the wilderness.

Magic in the Blood:

Whenever a High Sorcerer casts a spell, even one granted from his prior spellcasting class, he draws the energy more directly through himself than the typical spellcaster. Magic is part of his body, and losing this power from himself weakens the High Sorcerer's body. Most High Sorcerers, however, find pleasure in letting the magic course through their veins regardless of how it taxes them. Each casting of a spell grants the High Sorcerer **temporary negative hit points**.

Temporary negative hit points function somewhat like normal temporary hit points. Whenever a character gains temporary negative hit points, his hit point total is reduced, and so are his current hit points. Temporary negative hit points disappear after one hour, raising the character's hit point total and his current number of hit points. If before that hour the character is killed, he does not come back to life when the temporary negative hit points disappear.

Consult the following chart to determine how many temporary negative hit points the character receives when casting a given spell.

Spell Level*:	Temporary Negative Hit Points:
0-1	0
2-4	1
5-7	2
8-9	3

*Use the level of the spell slot the spell uses, adjusted for metamagic feats. For instance, a quickened *stoneskin* grants 3 temporary negative hit points, since it uses an 8th level slot, not a 4th level one.

For example, Trisalin, a 10th level Wizard/1st level High Sorcerer with 30 hit points, casts several spells in a combat and gains 13 negative hit points. He would lose 13 hit points, and as long as the temporary negative hit points persisted, even healing magic could not raise his hit points above 17. One hour after casting the spells, the temporary negative hit points accrued from them disappear. His maximum hit point total would increase by 13, and he would heal 13 points of damage.

A High Sorcerer vows to never use a physical tool, even his own body, when he can accomplish a task through magic.

Low Sorcery:

At every level from 1st to 9th, a High Sorcerer learns one new spell. This spell must be less than or equal to the level of the High Sorcerer, and must come from the spell list of his original spellcasting class. The High Sorcerer can cast this spell spontaneously by exchanging any spell slot of equal or higher level for a spell learned through Low Sorcery. For example, Trisalin, a 10th level Wizard/2nd level High Sorcerer, gains a new level of High Sorcerer. He can learn any Wizard spell of 3rd level or lower, and can spontaneously exchange any spell slot of 3rd level or higher to cast this spell.

Cantrip Mastery (Sp):

A High Sorcerer can use any cantrip at will as a spell-like ability requiring no foci and no verbal, somatic, or material components. The caster level for these spells is considered to be 1."

Dweomer Mastery:

At 2nd level and every even level thereafter, a High Sorcerer may pick any one spell he knows. When casting this spell, he takes 1 less point of subdual damage because of the Magic in the Blood ability. This ability is cumulative, so he may choose to apply it several times to the same spell.

Magic as the Blood:

At 3rd level, magic no longer so much courses through the High Sorcerer as it becomes part of his actual body. Whenever he would gain temporary negative hit points from the Magic in the Blood ability, he may choose to instead take an equal amount of temporary ability damage to Strength, Dexterity, or Constitution.

Middle Sorcery:

By 4th level a High Sorcerer reaches a level of understanding of arcane energies that he no longer needs material components or foci for his spells. The DM may rule that certain spells with exotic or expensive material components or foci still require those items.

Magic as the Soul:

No longer needing to channel outside energies through himself, at 5th level a High Sorcerer can expend a piece of his own soul to power his magic. Instead of gaining temporary negative hit points through the Magic in the Blood ability, the High Sorcerer can choose to spend a number of experience points equal to the spell level times the High Sorcerer's caster level.

For example, Trisalin, a 10th level Wizard/5th level High Sorcerer, can cast *Power Word, Stun* (a 7th level spell) by paying 105 experience points (7th level spell times caster level 15).

Greater Cantrip Mastery (Sp):

By 7th level, spells once considered difficult are now as simple as mere cantrips to the High

Sorcerer. In addition to the normal Cantrip Mastery, the High Sorcerer can use any 1st level spell at will as a spell-like ability requiring no foci and no verbal, somatic, or material components. The caster level for these spells is considered to be 1."

High Sorcery (Su):

At 9th level the High Sorcerer gains the ability to enchant his own body as if he were a magical item. If he has the Craft Wondrous Item or Forge Ring feats, he may use them to imbue the spells directly onto his own body, creating effects similar to that of equivalent magical items. This limits the High Sorcerer in that he cannot remove the enchantments without permanently dispelling them, but provides a bonus that no one can ever steal the item from him.

The process to enchant his body utilises magical oils, incenses, and fluids costing the same amount of gold pieces as would be required to create the equivalent magical item, and has the appropriate cost in experience points. The ritual takes 1 day for every 1000 gp the item would normally cost to create.

If a High Sorcerer imbues himself with the effects of a magical item through this ability, the appropriate physical area on his body is considered occupied for the purposes of wearing other magical items. The High Sorcerer may choose to 'take off' the enchantment, permanently negating it and freeing up that space on his body for a normal magical item.

For example, if Trisalin, now a 9th level High Sorcerer imbues himself with an effect identical to that of a *ring of featherfalling* (which has a market price of 2200 gp), he would have to spend 1100 gp worth of rare substances to power the enchantment, and expend 88 XP. The process would take 3 days to complete. He would have to choose one hand that 'wears' the enchantment, and from then on any magical rings worn on that hand would have no effect.

See the DM's Guide for more information on making magical items.

True Sorcery (Su):

At 10th level, the High Sorcerer has become so intuned with magical energies that he becomes a magical creature. He gains Spell Resistance 20 and damage reduction 20/+1. He may also cast *spectral hand* at will as a spell-like ability.

Additionally, he no longer needs to use verbal or somatic components to cast his spells. Whenever he does cast a spell, however, telltale signs reveal to onlookers that the High Sorcerer is using magic. These signs can range from his eyes glowing dimly, to the air thrumming with a deep bass hum, to waves of energy crashing upward from his feet and casting his hair about as if in an intense wind. These visual effects vary and can be personally chosen by each High Sorcerer, or even vary from spell to spell.

This ability effectively allows anyone who would normally have been able to tell he was casting a spell to still tell that he's casting a spell, but frees the High Sorcerer to speak and move freely. Additionally, any Spellcraft checks to determine what spell the High

Sorcerer is casting receive a –20 circumstance penalty.





An interview with Eric Noah of Eric Noah's Unofficial 3rd Edition D&D News

Hello Eric. I'm going to try and ask some questions that aren't asked in every interview.

For a start, and this, I'm sure has occurred to everyone at some point - how long do you think you will keep doing this? You've said before that you will stop when it becomes a chore. Where do you think you will be in, say, 2 or 5 years' time?

I'm almost positive I won't be doing this in even 2 years, but that varies from week to week. My feelings on the subject vary depending on how busy I personally am (and thus how much "real life" I'm prepared to trade in for working on the site), and how things are going on the message boards (if there's a nasty foul mood, that's when I start thinking about packing it in). But when I've got enough time (like now, during the summer -- being a teacher is great!), and when the board mood is jolly and pleasant, I feel like I could go on forever.



So what don't you like about being the webmaster of Eric Noah's Unofficial D&D 3E News?

I mentioned the amount of time it takes, and the few times when things get ugly on the message boards. Some parts of updating are particularly cumbersome, mostly because I'm not clever enough to figure out an automated way to handle them. The Conversion Library is what I'm mostly thinking of. There are a lot of steps involved with adding new materials or replacing old files with updates. But mostly it's time ... :)

When/if you stop, your visitors will be devastated - I would certainly miss it. Would you go for a clean break, or would you ease off gradually?

Clean break. Probably an announcement about a week before it happens. If I were to do so, I'd do my best to find someone else to hand stuff off to, but if I couldn't then I'd probably let the site sit (minus the message boards) unupdated until RPG Planet deems it no longer worth it. It does have a lot of valuable resources even without the constant updating.

Well, let's move on from the morbid stuff.

Cool. :)

You have said in the past that, when you first conceived of this site, you 'knew you had to do it'. Had you any web-based experience before this? Where did you think, at first, you were going to get all your scoops from?

I had run three education-related websites prior to starting with the D&D News site. And I had (and still have) my own personal RPG site (<http://members.home.net/noahrpg/>). So running a website was nothing new to me. I'd had experience, also, in being one of the fans that flocked to a fan site to gather up bits of news (for Baldur's Gate, in this case) and that's the kind of site I wanted mine to be like.

I initially spent a lot of time on the old WotC message board and on Usenet looking for clues about D&D. It wasn't more than a couple of days before people got the idea that they could send me links, quotes, playtest leaks :), anecdotes from personal experience at GenCon, etc.

I'm almost positive I won't be doing this in even 2 years, but that varies from week to week.

Did you just dive in immediately? Or did you do any research or planning before launching your site?

Oh, just jumped right in. I wasn't foreseeing a major site, just something to gather up the rumours. The first version of the site was hardly more than a list of quotes, with source and scooper named. I was using my personal web account through my home ISP at the time (does "mailbag" ring a bell with any of you out there? :). A happy coincidence in about March of 2000 led me to not only switch ISPs but to move over to RPG Planet, at the invitation of Joost "Silverdawn" Loijens, whose BGChronicles and Planet Neverwinter sites I very much wanted to emulate.

So how successful was your site at first? These days your site is, arguably, the most popular 3E fan-site on the internet, but things can't always have been like that?

Right -- I remember my wife being flabbergasted when the site was pulling in 100 hits a day. She couldn't believe it. I remember my first 10,000, my first 100,000. One million was a pretty special number -- not only a milestone, but occurring almost exactly



a year after the site opened in 1999. Going by my hit counter, I'm getting more action per day than I did in the first month and a half.

Your site-name. It certainly does what it says on the tin. Were you tempted to go for something a little more colourful?

Colourful is fun. And if I had it to do over again I certainly would have found a way to not use WotC's trademark in my site title. :) But I had this thought in the back of my head that people will use search engines to find sites, and that having "D&D" "third edition" and "news" in the title would help draw people and instantly inform them of what was going on. Seeing "Noah's Dungeon" or something on a list of sites might not really communicate what the site is about. Still, an acronym or something would have been a nice idea...

I remember my wife being flabbergasted when the site was pulling in 100 hits a day.

What is the secret of your success? What formula have you stumbled upon that all the other sites out there haven't?

It won't be a secret if I tell! :)

Okay, here are some thoughts...

1) Personalise it. Having my name on it means I'm responsible for it, for good or for ill. And it goes the other way -- I think posting scoopers' names (even when it's inconvenient to do so) and doing Community News helps people understand that my site is just part of a larger community.

2) Dedication. Day in and day out, do what has to be done. Putting it off until tomorrow only means you'll have twice as much stuff to do then.

3) Prioritise. Do the most important things first. And make sure your personal life gets in there somewhere.

4) Groom the site. Go through every now and then and clean out the old junk on the site.

5) Build relationships. Kinda related to #1, but being grateful when someone helps you out, being generous when you can, holding things in confidence when asked to do so, and keeping in mind that not everyone is exactly like you are keys to success in anything.

6) Hustle. At the start, you have to hustle. You have to be the best, and it doesn't hurt to be the first, especially in a market where others are trying to do the same thing you are. Leave your mark everywhere. Go to message boards and build relationships there. At the same time, there's a difference between hawking a product and offering a service.

As webmaster of the biggest unofficial D&D site on the web, what other D&D related sites do you visit often and why?

I visit Jamis Buck's Generators site to help me with my own D&D games. I generate almost all NPCs there, then tweak them by bumping skills or stats up or down and adding

equipment, but still have a great, compact stat block.

I visit RPG.net's message boards. It's important to me to get a feel for a variety of opinions on gaming in general, the RPG business, and especially pick up the vibe from people who are either indifferent to D&D or outright hate it.

I download angramainu's D&D Reference Sheets for my own game. They're indispensable. I hate cracking open books during games. That's also why I like stat blocks. :)

Otherwise I go to sites as needed for reporting the news. I am not one to go out and find other people's work to use (prestige classes, feats, etc.) in my own games, though I very much understand that other people love to do that.



Your message boards are often visited by publishers and D&D and 3E luminaries - Gary Gygax, Monte Cook and others. Do you think that this has anything to do with the success of your forums and your site - which came first the chicken or the egg?

The board community really defined itself before the bigwigs started showing up in numbers, though folks like Ryan Dancey and Keith Stroh were pretty early adopters. I think they found it was a good way to reach a large number of rabid fans quickly and easily. Then there was the month or so when WotC had no boards at all -- and a lot of WotC folk showed up to chit-chat and answer questions during that time. It is so gratifying to see these busy people stopping by to answer questions. And having Gary around is a particular blessing -- he's such an important link to the roots of RPG history.

What do you think of your following? Do you have any problems with online stalkers or 'fanboys'?

I don't have any over-eager fans, if that's what you mean by 'fanboy.' I have had some spamming problems (one person would sign me up for every WotC discussion group week after week and I had to go and unsubscribe; same person then created an e-mail account, subscribed to every porn newsletter imaginable, then set the account to forward to

me). Thankfully it's been about 6 months since that stuff has happened though I am a bit more paranoid due to that sort of thing.

One of the neatest things was getting to go to GenCon last year and meet some folks who read the site. I'm going again this year and I think we're trying to get a group together that night to go hang out or eat or something. That should be fun.



Ever have to modify your 'public persona'? You are always polite and reasonable on your message boards whatever the provocation - are you ever tempted to lash out or to 'flame' anyone?

I modify quite often. I have to. In some ways I'm an ambassador and I have to be on good behaviour all the time. It is sometimes frustrating that I can't really open up and share my opinions on certain things. But it would be inappropriate for me to use this venue to talk about anything other than D&D or D20, and even then I sometimes have to hold my tongue. That's also the reason I don't personally write product reviews. Imagine if you were head honcho at "Tiny Company X" and I wrote a review of your product saying "this thing sucks." I just can't imagine using my "power" to do that sort of thing.

On the other hand, I also have to be careful of "too much sucking up." I am not here to sell anyone's product. I am here to provide information in as neutral a fashion as possible. You'll notice I don't usually post whole "press releases" -- I summarise, take out the "goshes and gollies," and point you to the relevant site. And sometimes I have to report bad news. That's no fun, but it's important to the integrity of the site.

I have, recently, started being somewhat publicly cranky about WotC -- delays in the errata lists for published products, lack of information about Master Tools. Quite frankly, there was a time when I hoped that my work on the website would lead to work at WotC, and so I held my tongue in public on a number of occasions. Now that I know that I'd never be able to survive in a corporate setting, especially in a company that's having some "job stability" problems, it frees me up a little to complain about things a bit more.

In some ways I'm an ambassador and I have to be on good behaviour all the time. It is sometimes frustrating that I can't really open up and share my opinions on certain things.



Your forums are notably more civil and informative than the WotC ones. Why do you think this is? Is it because you are more 'strict' with regards conduct, or because WotC is regarded as a faceless entity while you are one man?

First, I think the WizOs do a fine job on their boards. And I certainly wouldn't say mine are "more" informative. WotC's boards have the advantage of being official -- and as such, they do get more posts from WotC folk than mine do. So I'd certainly encourage people to visit WotC's boards and get involved.

One of the neatest things was getting to go to GenCon last year and meet some folks who read the site.

WotC's boards are broader in scope than mine. You've got Pokémon and M:tG folks mingling with D&D and Star Wars folks. Not worse or better, but different. I think there might be a somewhat larger group of younger users over there than on my boards.

I am more strict, and I can get away with it. WotC never could. WotC's boards are like a public park -- sure, maybe the cops come by once in a while or even kick you out, but you can still turn up your radio as loud as you like. My boards are more like my home. When a guest enters a person's home, they're typically a little cautious, asking before putting their feet on the coffee table, and not quite sure where the restroom is. Most people get that and treat each other with a great deal of respect, and it really sets the tone.

How much of your time does your site take up? From my own experiences, running a good website can amount to a full-time job. Does it interfere with your personal life or your gaming life at all?

Hmm... I'd say it depends on the day, but between 1 and 4 hours per day. If I'm not checking the boards or digging for detail, I can get most updates done in one to one-and-a-half hours. Right now with school out of session, I'm only working in the mornings, and so I have plenty of time to do my web stuff and still get out for a 20-mile bike ride and get the lawn mowed. (That's today's agenda :)

My gaming life has always been a little sparse. I sometimes get to play twice a month, but it's usually a lot less than that. My players and I are all busy full-time working grownups, and it sucks! :) So no, the site hasn't interfered with that -- in fact, I met a great couple who joined my group through the message boards.



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Is there anything that you would like to do with the site that you can't for technical or time issues? Any future plans or additions of note?

I'd love to be able to do automated submissions. If I could do that, I'd probably expand into house rules, custom materials besides just the Conversion Library.

I'd love to write adventures for my site. I'm pretty good at it, and I make good maps. I just don't have the time, and frankly I don't know the rules well enough to do it with confidence these days. Winging it in my game is one thing, but winging it in a published adventure wouldn't fly.

I'd like to do another couple of Combat Examples, and I'd like to do more Rules Illustrated pieces like my AOO diagrams.

Other than that, I don't have any special plans for expansion. Except I would like to add some more Hosted Sites -- it's like expanding my site but someone else does the work. :)

As a school librarian, do you have a 3E following from students who visit your site?

A couple of kids have mentioned that they read the site. Not many.

You have a very popular site, and there is potential for profit there. I realise that, at RPGPlanet, you are unable to run a business, but have you ever considered 'going commercial'?

The more I read about the state of internet advertising, the better my current arrangement with Gamespy and RPG Planet seems. Let's just leave it at that. :)

Do you read anything into the future of 3E with all these staff changes at WotC, people leaving or transferring to other departments?

Life is full of change. At my own job, we have teachers coming and going every year. I'd love for things to stay exactly the same, it would make my job easier, but it never does. People have new opportunities, or setbacks, and you just have to deal with it. I don't see D&D's future changing amid all of it. Except that the D20 System deal is an excellent way to see that D&D lives on and thrives.

Do you think there's still a lot of room for improvement in D&D? What would you like to see in D&D 4E?

I'd like a lot more detail in terms of skills. I find that Listen and Spot, the two most commonly used skills, are the most difficult to adjudicate. I'd like more

clarification/expansion of the Challenge Rating/Encounter Level/XP system. We need some underwater combat rules. So far though it's pretty comprehensive.

What thoughts have you on the evolution of the D&D game, from Gary Gygax's first AD&D book through to the recent 3E rulebooks? Improvement all the way, or was 2E a downer?

2E was a definite improvement. It took a great stride toward character customisation in the form of kits. Whether a particular kit was balanced or not, the concept of "tweak here and there" was a very good one for character development. The addition of proficiencies was another step in that direction. 3E is an improvement, yes, but I also see it as different enough that it's almost a completely different game. That's fine by me -- it's fun and people who played D&D can pick it up pretty quickly, and that's all I ask.

What about the d20 system? How do you see the state of the market in a few years time? Which publishers do you think have the real staying power?

Publishers that already have resources in place stand the best chance of surviving. And those that don't might well want to do what Necromancer Games and Fiery Dragon Productions have done -- partner up with someone who does (in this case, Sword & Sorcery Studios).

I think the ones that will succeed are the ones that are either a) publishing a mix of some adventures and some non-adventure supplements, or b) publishing only non-adventure supplements. I think the ones that are relying on campaign settings are going to have a hard time unless their setting is superb. And the ones relying on adventures will likewise have trouble unless they are the best of the best.

Products that will flop are ones that take a few elements from the SRD, stir them up, and add a sprinkling of new stuff. Products that will shine are ones that add substantially to the rules, fill gaps in the rules, or otherwise make you say, "Wow, I didn't realise it but I REALLY need that product!"

Is there anything that you are particularly looking forward to? Or any products that you would like to see published?

The thing I can't live without right now is Master Tools. I want to see Traps & Treachery from Fantasy Flight Games. I'm curious about a number of other sourcebooks/accessories. I have no interest in campaign settings and very little interest in typical adventure modules.

What about the film industry. With the recent D&D film, and the upcoming Lord of the Rings film, do you think that fantasy movies are about to become mainstream? And will this have any effect on D&D?

I don't think fantasy films will be mainstream any time soon, and I don't think it will affect the pen-and-paper RPG industry at all.

Products that will shine are ones that add substantially to the rules, fill gaps in the rules, or otherwise make you say, "Wow, I didn't realise it but I REALLY need that product!"

What about your gaming? Are you in a long term campaign at the moment? What is the longest campaign in which you have played?

I'm running my group through a Realms campaign using Bastion of Faith from 2E as the setting. Every PC has at least one level of cleric. It's taken us about 9 months to get through the first two adventures, that's how infrequently we play nowadays.

I've been with my current group for about 6 years. We've run three Planescape and one FR Underdark game in that time, plus the FR Bastion game I mentioned. Campaigns typically last about a year or so.

Describe your favourite character and an anecdote that illustrates why.

I don't play as a player often enough to be able to do that.

You have a policy of helping other sites to grow - in particular through use of your hosted and partner site concepts. EN World, for example, owes you a lot, as do your other hosted sites. Why did you decide to host sites in this manner?

Well, in a sense my site is a hosted site of RPG Planet. And there are many other computer game sites on that network and on Gamespy in general that have cadres of hosted sites. Bringing on a hosted site does a couple of things -- it allows me to showcase a site that I think is so good everyone should see it, and it helps fill in and make my site more "complete." On the other hand, it also brings with it some responsibility to give those sites a bit more "royal treatment" -- it only looks bad for me if a hosted site isn't doing well. That's why I'm extremely picky about taking on new hosted sites -- they have to be the best of the best, and they have to be "alive" and offer reasons to come back again and again.

One thing that your site has never had is fan-created materials (other than conversions). You have said that you wanted to host conversions from the start. This begs two questions - why conversions in particular, and why not general fan-created materials (especially since you have a House Rules forum where such materials are being constantly developed)?

Why conversions? Because I personally have a lot of older materials, and because I felt it would help convince those "on the fence" about switching to 3E. Oddly enough, I've found that I never seek conversion documents and that I don't plan on running much older stuff.

Why not other stuff? If I did that, it would be too much for one guy to handle. I have to draw lines and say, "This is where my site's scope ends." Plus many other sites are doing that, and that's great, I knew they would. I never intended my site to be one-stop-shopping for D&D. I like a site with some focus.



The ENnies are approaching. The idea has been around for a while (most notably in various 'The Noah's' threads over the last couple of years), but you have never actually gone ahead with the idea. Although you are now partnering with EN World for this event, why did you not run with it solo earlier?

The sheer logistics of it was one reason. I very much appreciate you arranging all of that, btw! :) The other reason is the same reason I don't do product reviews -- the thought that the Noah name could be used to either directly sell a product or keep one from seeing the light of day kind of bothers me. Now that it's clearly not "my" award, but a community award, I'm much more comfortable with the idea.

The other reason is the same reason I don't do product reviews -- the thought that the Noah name could be used to either directly sell a product or keep one from seeing the light of day kind of bothers me.

Do you believe that they will be useful to the fans and publishers?

Yeah, if a lot of publishers submit. If we only get a handful of submissions in a particular category, that's not going to help the public much. In this case, I think it's literally almost as good to be nominated as it is to win.

We're drawing to an end here. One last question: tell us a joke.

That's not a question. Next!

Thanks Eric.



Mixed Blood

By Russell Morrissey
(tweaked by Ryan Nock)

Most D&D settings have their Half Elves and their Half Orcs, but occasionally one wonders what would happen if a Dwarf and an Elf were to produce offspring. What would a character whose grandmother was Half-Elven and whose Great Grandfather on the other side of the family was a Gnome?

There are two answers to this question. The easy one is that the only possible racial combinations are Elf-Human and Orc-Human. No other genetic mixes are possible. Of course, one could then ask what happens when one's parents are a Half-Elf and Human (are you a Quarter-Elf?); many would, again, answer that any elf blood means that the character is a half elf.

I prefer the other way of looking at it. Any standard race can breed with any other. You can be a half-Dwarf half-Gnome if you so wish. You can be a human with a trace of Orcish blood from your grandfather without being a Half-Orc. These simple rules will allow you to create such characters.

To create a character, you may spend 4 points on racial traits. Some traits are negative and give you extra points to spend (for example, the smaller size of halflings and gnomes are a distinct disadvantage). To create a pureblood character, you need simply spend all 4 points on the traits given for that race.

Additionally, some people carry the blood of the celestials or infernals. A normal PC starting at 1st level will not be able to play a full-blooded celestial or infernal, but alternative rules below give DMs the option of allowing characters to play a more powerful race, but start at a lower class level than usual.



Your character's dominant race is determined by comparing the total number of points spent for traits of each race, counting negative traits as positive in points. For example, if you take the Dwarven Gruffness trait, which costs -1 points, and Dwarven Craftsmanship, a 1 point trait, you effectively have 2 points of Dwarf traits. Whichever race you have spent the most points on (negative and positive) is your dominant race. For example, if you have 3 points of Dwarf traits, 2 in human traits, and 1 in Gnomish traits, you are considered predominately a Dwarf. If you have spent equal points in multiple races, choose one as a dominant race.

Before adding any racial traits, all characters default to the following:

DEFAULT RACIAL TRAITS

- Medium Size
- Movement 30 feet
- Favoured Class: Your character's favoured class is given by the race in which you have spent the most points, counting negative points as positive. If you have spent equal points in more than one class, you may choose one favoured class from classes available to those races.
- Automatic Languages (as dominant race – see PHB)

You may choose abilities from any race or combination of races, spending your 4 points as would be appropriate to your character's heritage. You cannot, however, spend more than a total of 8 positive points, and no more than 4 negative points. For example, you cannot take multiple negative traits worth -6 points in order to spend 10 points for positive traits. In cases of such elaborate cross-racial breeding, some traits are usually weeded out.

Note that these traits do not stack, and you cannot take traits that have no effect because of this lack of stacking. For example, you cannot take both Dwarven Gruffness and Orcish Untrustworthiness in order to get a -4 penalty to Charisma. Similarly, you cannot pick both Halfling Agility and Elven Grace, because the +2 bonus to Dexterity each provides would not stack. Nor can you take abilities with opposite effects, such as Dwarven Stoniness and Elvish Frailty, since the two modifiers to Constitution cancel each other out.

There is logic to these stacking rules. If two Elven parents, both with a racial +2 Dexterity were to mate, they would not spawn an Elf with +4 Dexterity. The child would be a normal Elf with the standard +2. So if the two parents were Elf and Halfling (both who get +2 Dexterity), the result is still a child with +2 Dexterity.



Human (Favoured Class: Bard)

Trait Name	Description	Cost
Human Adaptability	1 extra feat at 1st level	2
Human Versatility	Allows the character to choose any class as his favoured class	1
Human Ingenuity	4 extra skill points at 1st level and 1 each level thereafter	1

Gnome (Favoured Class: Illusionist)

Trait Name	Description	Cost
Gnomish Artifice	+2 alchemy	1
Gnomish Techniques	+1 to hit kobolds and goblinoids, +4 AC vs. giants	1
Gnomish Senses	Low light vision, +2 listen	1
Gnomish Ingenuity	+2 Con, ability to speak to tiny or smaller burrowing animals	1
Gnomish Size	-2 Str, Small size, Base speed 20 feet	-2
Gnomish Magic	Cantrips, +2 on Illusion saves.	2

Dwarf (Favoured Class: Fighter)

Trait Name	Description	Cost
Dwarven Stoniness	+2 Con, +2 poison save, +2 saves vs. spells	2
Dwarven Craftsmanship	Stonecunning, +2 appraise, +2 craft when concerning stone or metal items.	1
Dwarven Techniques	+1 to hit Orcs and Goblinoids, +4 AC vs. Giants	1
Dwarven Darkvision	Range of 60 feet	2
Dwarven Gruffness	Charisma -2	-1
Dwarven Height	Speed 20 feet	-1

Halfling (Favoured Class: Rogue)

Trait Name	Description	Cost
Halfling Agility	+2 dex, +2 climb, jump, move silently	3
Halfling Keenness	+2 listen, +1 attack with thrown weapons	1
Halfling Indomitability	+1 on all saves, +2 on fear saves	2
Halfling Size	-2 Str, Speed 20 feet, Size small	-2

Elf (Favoured Class: Wizard)

Trait Name	Description	Cost
Elven Grace	+2 Dexterity, +2 to Balance checks.	2
Elven Resistances	Immune to sleep, +2 save enchantments	1
Elvensight	Low-light Vision, +2 Search, +2 Spot.	1
Elven Techniques	Long sword or rapier proficiency; and Longbow, shortbow, composite longbow and composite shortbow proficiency	1
Elven Alertness	+2 Listen, secret door detection (see PHB 16)	1
Elven Frailty	Constitution -2	-1

Orc (Favoured Class: Barbarian)

Trait Name	Description	Cost
Orcish Brawn	+4 Strength	5
alternative: Lesser Orcish Brawn	+2 Strength	3
Orcish Darkvision	Range 60 feet	2
Orcish Senses	Listen +2, Spot +2	1
Orcish Ignorance	-2 Intelligence	-1
Orcish Impulsiveness	-2 Wisdom	-1
Light Sensitivity	-1 to attack rolls in bright sunlight	-1
Orcish Untrustworthiness	-2 Charisma	-1



Celestial (Favoured Class: Paladin)

Trait	Description	Cost
Smite Evil	Additional damage against evil creatures, equal to total class levels, once per day.	2
Darkvision	Range 60 feet	2
Celestial Grace	Spell Resistance equal to 6 + total class levels.	3
Celestial Majesty	+2 Charisma; can cast light once per day as a sorcerer of his level.	2
Divine Aura of Menace	A hostile creature within 20 feet must Will save (DC 10) or suffer -2 morale penalty to attacks, AC, and saves for one day, or until the creature successfully hits the celestial.	3
Damage Reduction	DR 5/+1.	3
Angel Wings	Has feathered wings; can fly at twice normal base speed (good manoeuvrability).	6
Blessing of Tongues	Can speak with any creature that has a language, as per the tongues spell.	2
Celestial Resistance	Cold and Fire Resistance 5, +4 to saves vs. poison	2

A character will not have enough points to start as a fully infernal or celestial character, but he may buy some abilities to indicate a partially infernal or celestial heritage.



Fiend (Favoured Class: Sorcerer)

Trait	Description	Cost
Smite Good	Additional damage against good creatures, equal to total class levels, once per day.	2
True Darkvision	Range unlimited, even in a Deeper Darkness spell or the equivalent.	3
Damage Reduction	5/+1.	3
Tempting Tongue	Cast suggestion once per day as a sorcerer of his level.	2
Wilting Hand	Contact poison, with any unarmed attack. Fort DC 11. Initial and Secondary damage, 1d3 Str.	4
Infernal Flight	Has bat wings; can fly at twice normal base speed (good manoeuvrability).	6
Dark Cunning	+2 Intelligence; can cast darkness once per day as a sorcerer of his level.	2
Fiendish Resistances	Cold and Fire Resistance 5, +4 to saves vs. poison.	2
Light Sensitivity	-1 to attack rolls in bright sunlight	-1
Fiendish Sorcery	Spell Resistance equal to 6 + total class levels.	3

Alternate Rules for more powerful races:

At the DM's discretion, a character may play a more powerful race with infernal or celestial blood, at the cost of having fewer class levels. A character may start with 8 points to choose a race. If he does so, his race counts as +1 class level for determining experience. For example, a "Dark Elf" (see below for details) has 8 points of racial abilities, and thus counts as +1 class level. A 2nd level Dark Elf Sorcerer is considered a 3rd level character, and needs to get enough experience points to reach 4th level before he can advance to 3rd level in his class.

If a character uses this option, he may spend no more than 12 positive points and 4 negative points.

Sample powerful race:

Albino Elves (Emberhyst): Centuries ago, a group of fiends pursued a fleeing band of refugee Elves into caves far beneath the world. Both groups were trapped below ground by an epic earthquake, and the fiends subjugated the Elves, bred with them, and produced the cruel Emberhyst.

Abilities: Elven Grace (2), Elven Resistances (1), Elvish Frailty (-2), True Darkvision (3), Light Sensitivity (-1), Dark Cunning (2), Fiendish Sorcery (3).





EN World Annual d20 System Awards

The EN World d20 System Awards (known as the 'ENNies') allow the gaming public to give the best publishers, writers and artists the recognition they deserve. These prestigious annual awards are a sign of quality and excellence, a visible symbol that tells people that they are looking at something a cut above the rest.

These awards are specifically for products and publishers working within the d20 system licensed by Wizards of the Coast.

What is the selection process?

Publishers were invited to submit products in each category. Each publisher could only submit one product per category. From these submissions, the selection team will choose five nominations for each. All nominees have the right to place the nominee symbol upon their websites, literature or products.

All of the entries have now been received. Nearly 20 publishers are taking part in this event.

These nominations are voted on by the D&D community. Those that win in each category will have the right to put the winner symbol upon their websites, literature or products.



What are the award categories?

- Best adventure
- Best campaign world/setting
- Best accessory (less than 100 pages)
- Best rulebook (more than 100 pages)
- Best art (cover, interior)
- Best cartography
- Best publisher (overall)
- Best free product
- Best official website
- Best fan website

- Best writer
- Best editor

Who will be deciding which products are nominated for an award?

The Nominee Selection Committee consists of five members. They are supported in an advisory role by the Reserve Committee. You can see brief biographies of the committee members on the next page.

Where will the ceremony take place?

The ceremony will take place live on July 29th at 9pm Central Time. The event will take place on a moderated IRC channel, and the awards will be presented by Mr. Gary Gygax, one of the founders of the D&D game. All are welcome to attend and watch, but only selected people will be given 'voice' in the room, for obvious reasons.



IRC? What's that?

You can download mIRC from www.mirc.com. Once installed, it's a simple process to select the channel and server required.

For those of you that don't wish to brave the mIRC experience, we will be installing a java-based 'room' on the EN World site so that you can join in the festivities via your normal web-browser.

We look forward to seeing you there!



Organisers

Morrus

Russell 'Morrus' Morrissey is the webmaster of the EN World Site and organiser of the EN World d20 System Awards. He lives in England. If you have any queries about the EN World d20 System Awards, you can contact him at morrus@lineone.net

Liquide

Robert 'Liquide' Ljung is responsible for the technical side of the proceedings. Robert designed the awards and the EN World logo. Robert comes from Sweden.

FREAKSTONE

Chris 'Freakstone' Freestone will be the IRC Operator at the ENnies.



Selection Committee

The Selection Committee is responsible for choosing the nominations from all of the submitted products.

Piratecat

Kevin 'Piratecat' Kulp has over 20 years of gaming experience in over a dozen rules systems, and is a 3e playtester whose playtest group was featured in both Dragon Magazine and WotC's web site. He has helped playtest the 3e core rules, the *Psionics Handbook*, and the upcoming WotC products *Manual of the Planes* and *Song & Silence*. A moderator of Eric Noah's well-known message boards and a former RPGA regional director, he remains highly active in RPGA activities.

EricNoah

Eric 'EricNoah' Noah is the webmaster of [Eric Noah's Unofficial D&D Third Edition News](#).

Creative Mountain

Mark 'Creative Mountain' Clover's experience with D&D began in 1975 when he first began playing at a club in north-eastern Illinois. Five years after that, he began piecing together his own campaign world. He is currently bringing it online.

He has played a number of other gaming systems, but only in a cursory way (jumping into games at cons and gaming clubs just to check them out). D&D (AD &D) is really the only or main focus of his hobby gaming life. He is the type of DM who sticks to the core rules (he reads them all, and has owned most, but stays with the core to maintain consistency).

Mark, currently a Guild level RPGA member, will be running D&D features at GenCon as well as running LG modules at a number of game days prior to then. GenCon Eight was his first convention experience and (if memory serves) that was the last year it was held in Lake Geneva (the old Playboy Club - insert obligatory Woohoo!).

Mark's primary focus in life is to become a writer of fiction, mainly Swords and Sorcery/Sci-fi/Fantasy, et al. though not restricted to those genres.

He is 38 and has lived in Chicago for the last fifteen years. After studying Speech and Performing Arts at Northeastern, he spent about ten years in a highly respected theatre company in Chicago acting, directing and playwriting.

TheShadowOfMyFormerSelf

Florian 'The ShadowOfMyFormerSelf' Schulz has been playing pen-and-paper RPGs since 1988. His first experience with AD&D, though, was the computer RPG "Champions of Krynn", which made him start with the pen-and-paper version soon afterward. Since then, he's played in most official AD&D worlds, as well as in quite a few unofficial ones. He's most often the DM, which he prefers, but has had more than a little experience on the other side of the DM's screen over the years. Apart from playing, he also likes just collecting RPG books.

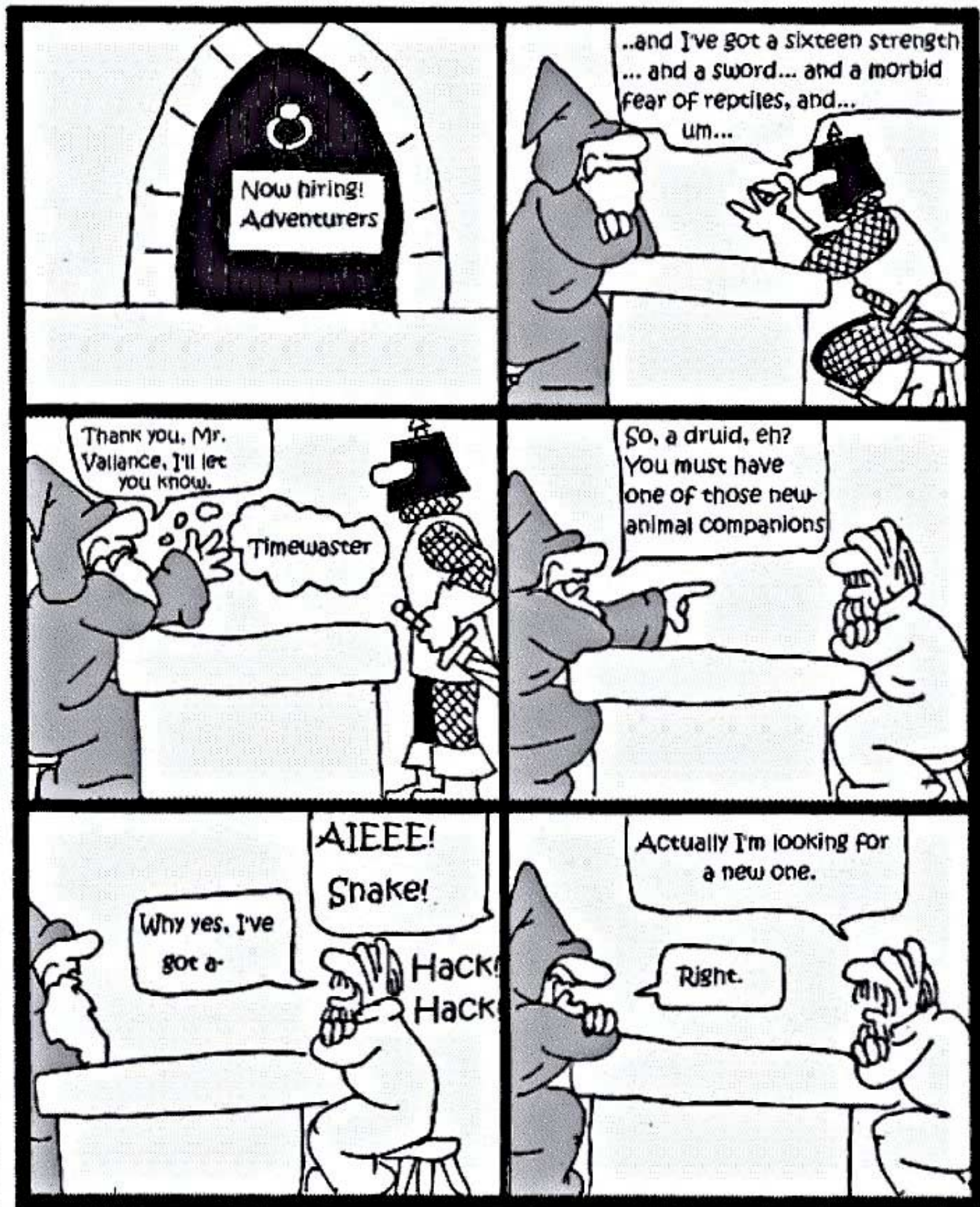
In the last two years or so, Florian started to involve himself in the Internet RPG community (though he hasn't played on-line yet). At first, this meant mostly World of Darkness, but since the announcement of the release of D&D third edition, this changed gradually. His only (semi-) "official" involvement in RPGs is being one of Eric Noah's scoopers.

Teflon Billy

Jeff 'Teflon Billy' Ranger has been an RPG enthusiast since his 10th year (which means that he have been into this stuff more than a fifth of a century-*sigh*). In that time he has made tenuous (and largely unsuccessful) forays into the industry under the tutelage of the late, great Nigel Findley and as they say, those who can't do it themselves...criticise.

The Short Straw

(c) Adrian Czajkowski 2001



Rites of Passage



The Unkindest Cut of All written by Osvaldo Oyola Ortega

This adventure is taken from *Midgard: The Online d20 Adventure Magazine*. *Midgard* is currently looking for submissions, and offers prizes for the best adventures submitted.

"Rites of Passage" is an Interlude for a party of 4 to 6 1st-level characters (or alternately, 4-8 characters with NPC classes of levels 1 to 2). This adventure is meant to introduce new characters to their first real combat encounter... and learn that all is not always what it seems.

¥ Non-player Characters (NPCs)
£ Monsters

Adventure Overview

While passing through or near to the town of Cutter Jack's the party discovers a standing bounty on the ears of goblins; left ears that is. The catch is that the bounty has been around for generations as a way to curb the local goblin population, and the goblin tribe (the Na-Sor) adopted the custom of removing the left ear of adolescents when they reach adulthood as a sign of defiance against their human oppressors. The law regarding the bounty was never changed, and the goblin population has not risen sufficiently in the past few generations for the monsters to be a threat. So, it was forgotten except for a few mouldy signs and some mischievous locals.

When new-comers come through or nearby town, the locals tend to bring up the goblin bounty to send the would-be bounty collectors on a wild-geese chase. Even if they find and kill goblins, the left ear has already been removed, making it worthless in terms of profit.

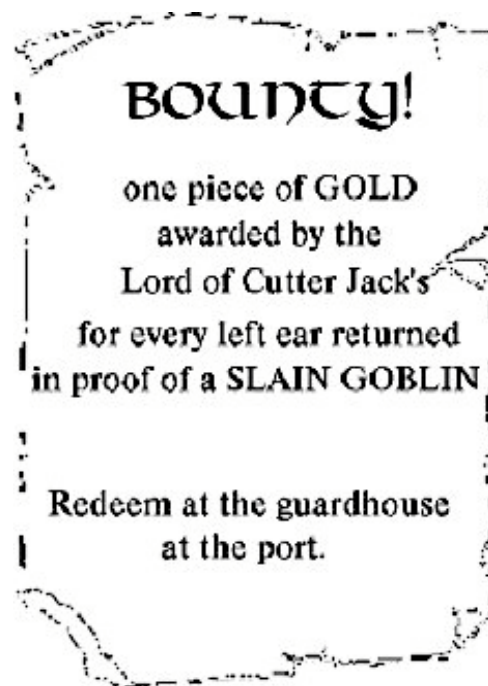
However, if and when the PCs go hunting goblins they will stumble upon the very ceremony of coming of age where these ears are removed, and in interrupting the goblin rite of passage, instigate their own.

Beginning the Adventure

The adventure can begin one of two ways (or a DM could incorporate both):

While travelling through the hilly woods, south of Cutter Jack's, the party is startled by a deer being chased by two hunters. If you want to get your players into the right mood with a few skill checks, you could give Druid or Ranger PCs a chance to calm the deer, or for others characters to down it. Whatever they do, the two hunters (David and Andre) explain that the deer was startled by the sound of the party coming - and they hesitated (rather than chase right away) afraid that the party was a group of goblins. If the party inquires about the goblins, the hunters inform them about the bounty for goblin ears: 1 piece of gold per left ear. They add that it has to be left so that people don't try to cash in twice. Such bounties can be collected in at the town guardhouse. They give directions to the ravine and mine shaft. If the party enters town, locals can confirm what the two hunters said.

The second option is as follows: after coming into town to re-supply, the PCs come upon an old posting that reads:



Asking locals about town will confirm this. They can give directions to the PCs towards the "old mine" as they call it.

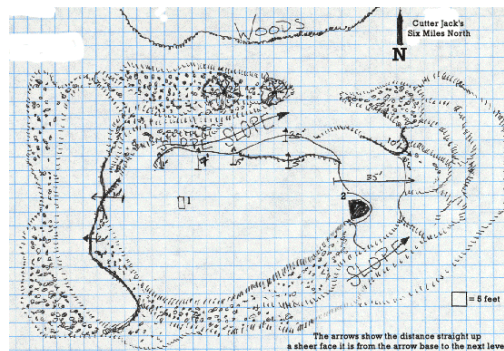
The Hunters

¥ **Andre** - Human Male Expert 2: CR ½
Medium-sized humanoid (6' tall) HD:
2d6+4 hps: 13 Init: +1, Spd: 30 ft., AC: 7
(leather + dex) At: +1 (+2 melee or
ranged) Al: N SV: Fort: +2 Ref: +1, Will:
+3;
Str: 12, Dex: 13, Con: 15 Int: 10 Wis: 11,
Cha: 10
Skills: Climb (+3), Craft, Leatherworking
(+4), Handle Animal (+3), Hide (+5), Intuit
Direction (+2), Knowledge - Nature (+3),
Move Silently (+4), Profession - Hunter
(+5), Spot (+3), Swim (+3), Wilderness
Lore (+5)
Feats: Tracking
SQ: Suffers -4 attack penalty with bow and
axe.
Possessions: Hand axe, short bow (12
arrows), skinning knife, dagger

¥ **David** - Human Male Expert 2 : CR ½
Medium-sized humanoid (6' tall) HD:
2d6+4 hps: 13 Init: +1, Spd: 30 ft., AC: 6
(leather + dex) At: +1 (+2 melee or
ranged) Al: N SV: Fort: +2 Ref: +1, Will:
+3;
Str: 13, Dex: 14, Con: 12 Int: 11 Wis: 13,
Cha: 9
Skills: Climb (+3), Craft, Leatherworking
(+4), Handle Animal (+3), Hide (+5), Intuit
Direction (+2), Search (+3), Move Silently
(+4), Profession - Hunter (+5), Spot (+3),
Swim (+3), Wilderness Lore (+5)
Feats: Martial Weapon (short bow)
SQ: Suffers -4 attack penalty with axe.
Possessions: Hand axe, short bow (12
arrows), skinning knife, dagger

The Ravine and the Old Mine

The place the locals refer to as "the old mine" was once the goblin tribe's lair. However, they were forced to abandon the place when the locals discovered that copper could be found there and the old bounty first began. While the goblins have found another place to lair that they prefer, they still see this spot as a sacred part of their homeland and return for important ceremonies like the coming of age ritual.



A larger version of this map can be found on the last page of this document.

The ravine itself is surrounded by a layer of brush that gives (25%) cover to anyone at the top. The western side is a steep wall of black stone (climb DC 25), while the east side (above the mine shaft) is a craggy hill of plateaus that while covered in small shrubs provide no cover (climb DC 15). The southern side is much less of a steep slope covered in thorny vines that (painfully) aid climbing (climb DC 0). The natural erosion of the stone on the northern side has created a ramp down to the ravine floor (see map).

The floor of the ravine is a fine gravel, that kicks up into dust easily.

The following text includes a description for characters that sneak up to the edge of the ravine to spy on the action below:

The moonlight reveals a strange ritual. Large ruddy-skinned goblins in studded leather armour flank a black altar stone. They appear impassive, and wield spears. Behind the altar are five apparently young goblins in two rows. They are armoured as well, but not armed. Just off to the side and front of the altar stone is a line of 5 more young goblins. They are armed and hold spears upright at their sides, but have their hands up to the left side of their head. Immediately before the altar is a squat goblin dressed in wolf-hides. Around his neck is a necklace, which holds a wolf-skull, and at his side is a vicious-looking club.

As you watch, a young goblin steps up onto the black stone and kneels before the wolf-skin garbed one. This goblin begins to speak some words and look to the sky. He punches the goblin twice in the chest, who then growls and bows his head. The leader of the ceremony then takes the young goblin's head in his hands and there is a quick jerking motion. The performer of the ceremony steps back, as



the young goblin steps off the stone dazedly. He steps over to one of the flanking warriors and is handed a spear. He then takes his place in line with the others holding their hands to their heads

It is wholly possible that the game-master may have to abridge or alter the above description based on the character's actions. The intensity of the ceremony makes it so that all involved suffer a -4 circumstance penalty to spot or listen checks. However, Gar-wog's (the goblin sorcerer) familiar (a bat) is hanging in nearby tree, near the north end of the ravine. If the party approaches from this side the bat will surely see and/or hear them, unless the party is taking precautions to be stealthy.

£ Bat Familiar - Diminutive animal, HD: 1/4 d8 Hps: 2, Initiative: +2 (dex), Speed: 5 ft., fly 40 ft (good), AC: 16 (+4 size, +2 dex), Attacks: Nil, Damage: Nil SQ: Blindsight Saves: Fort: +2, Ref +4, Will: +2 Abilities: Str: 1 (-5) Dex: 15 (+2), Con: 10, Int: 2 (-5), Wis: 14 (+2), Cha: 4 (-4) Skills: Listen: +9, Move Silently: +6, Spot: +9

The bat will immediately fly to within range to alert its master. Allow the PCs in the area a spot check to notice the bat, it will be moving at four times its speed to get to its master.

Once the goblin warlock is alerted to the PCs' presence, he will send the two flanking warriors up the stone ramp to engage them, and yell at the dazed goblins who have had their ears removed to take some action. He will do this as moving to place the ramp wall against his back to avoid being a target for spells or missile fire and remain there until all his goblins have engaged and then support them with spells. He will send out his bat to circle above to give him reports on where PCs might be hidden and then yell instructions to his warriors.

The "uncut" goblins will stand about confused for a round and then begin to run towards the southern end of the ravine and climb out in order to escape. As they are officially not "adults" until their ear is cut, they are not allowed to take part in combat.

The "cut" goblins will stand dazed in pain for 1d3 rounds, or until attacked.

£ **Goblin Warriors (2)** - Small Humanoid

(goblinoid) Warrior 2 HD:2d8 hps: 13 each CR: 1/2 Initiative: +1 (Dex) Spd: 30 ft. AC: 15 (Studded leather + dex + size) AT: short spear +1 or dagger +1 (ranged: +2) Damage: short spear 1d6-1, dagger 1d4-1. Al: LE SV: (Fort: +3, Ref: +1, Will: +0); Str: 8 (-1) Dex: 13 (+1) Con: 11 Int: 10 Wis: 11 Cha: 8 (-1) Skills: Hide: +6, Listen: +3, Move Silently: +4, Spot: +3. Feats: Alertness SQ: Darkvision 60 ft. Possessions: Each wears a small leather helmet, a short spear and a dagger.

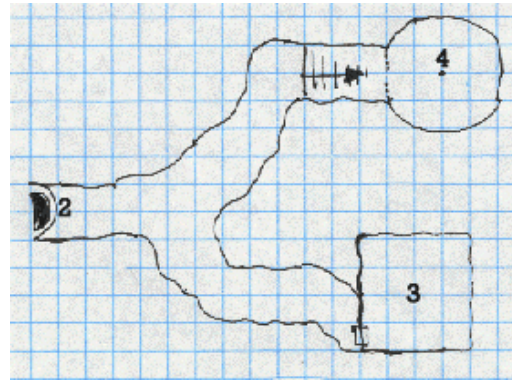
£ **"Cut" Goblins (6)** - Small Humanoid (goblinoid) Warrior 1 HD:1d8 hps: 4 each (6 unhurt) each CR: 1/2 Initiative: +1 (Dex) Spd: 30 ft. AC: 15 (Studded leather + dex + size) AT: short spear +1 (ranged: +2) Damage: short spear 1d6-1 Al: LE SV: (Fort: +2, Ref: +1, Will: +0); Str: 8 (-1) Dex: 13 (+1) Con: 11 Int: 10 Wis: 11 Cha: 8 (-1) Skills: Hide: +6, Listen: +1, Move Silently: +4, Spot: +3. Feats: Alertness SQ: Darkvision 60 ft. Possessions: Each has a short spear. These goblins have a -2 penalty to listen checks because of the recent loss of their ear.

£ **"Uncut" Goblins (4)** - Small Humanoid (goblinoid) Warrior 1 HD:1d8 hps: 4 each (6 unhurt) each CR: 1/2 Initiative: +1 (Dex) Spd: 30 ft. AC: 15 (Studded leather + dex + size) AT: Unarmed +1 Damage: Unarmed (1d2-1) Al: LE SV: (Fort: +2, Ref: +1, Will: +0); Str: 8 (-1) Dex: 13 (+1) Con: 11 Int: 10 Wis: 11 Cha: 8 (-1) Skills: Hide: +6, Listen: +1, Move Silently: +4, Spot: +3. Feats: Alertness SQ: Darkvision 60 ft. Possessions: These goblins carry nothing.

These goblins will seek to escape as quickly as possible. If confronted they will run rather than fight, and will only fight if cornered, and even then if the sorcerer and the two warriors are killed they will surrender, and try their hardest in broken common to beg for mercy. As soon as they get out of ravine they will run back to their lair. The lair does not fall into the scope of this adventure and is over an hour's march away in an abandoned fort (see 'Continuing the Adventure', below).

¥ **Gar-Wog** - Small humanoid (goblinoid), Sorcerer 2; HD: 2d4 hps: 13 CR: 2 Initiative: +1 (dex), Spd: 30 ft. AC: 14 (Size + Dex + Leather), AT: Club +1, Ceremonial Dagger +1 Damage: 1d6-1 (club), 1d4-2 (dagger). AL: LE SV: (Fort: +1, Ref: +1, Will: +4); Str: 9 (-1), Dex: 13 (+1), Con: 12 (+1) Int: 11, Wis: 12 (+1), Cha: 14 (+2)
Skills: Concentration +3, Hide: +6, Listen +3, Move Silently +3, Spellcraft +3.
Feats: Light Armour Proficiency, Toughness
SQ: Spell-casting, Has the benefits of Alertness (+2 Listen and Spot) when his familiar is within arm's reach, Darkvision 60', +2 to listen from familiar when in arm's reach.
Spell Progression: 0: 6 1: 4 (10% Arcane failure)
Spells Known: 0th -- Daze, Detect Magic, Resistance, Steal Sleep; 1st -- Acid Spittle*, Disappear*
Possessions: Gar-Wog wears leather armour, has a necklace with the skull of a young wolf, flanked by the skulls of two wolf-pups. He wears a tarnished [gold signet ring](#) (worth 80 gps; see below), and carries his spell components in a belt pouch. He also wields a club and carries ceremonial knife made of an ox bone. It is fragile and dull and only does 1d4-1 (minimum 1) points of damage when used in melee, a bag of goblin ears (a number equal to the "cut" goblins).

Gar-Wog will remain behind his goblin warriors and cast spells from there, casting acid spittle and then moving in to spit it and moving away. He will also try to use Daze on obvious fighters and his warriors will gang up on that character for that round. If forced to flee he heads first towards the southern end of the ravine to climb away. If this way is blocked, he heads to the mine to hide and then use Disappear and try to sneak past the party.



Points of Interest

1. The Black Stone: This black square stone obviously was brought here from somewhere else, but examination of how it lies will tell an observant individual that it has been here quite some time. It can be pried out of the gravely dirt, but weighs 200 lbs. It is 1½ feet tall, by 2 feet wide, by 3 feet long. It is stained in fresh goblin blood.

2. The Old Mine: The entrance is about ten feet high and 15 feet wide. Any light from outside reaches about 20' in and then visibility becomes a problem. Anyone using the tracking feat should be able to tell (DC 10) that no one has walked here in quite some time.

3. The Break Room: This room once had a door, which now hangs splintering from one rusty hinge. Read the following aloud to your players:

This dusty room carved of the earth is filled with broken furniture and rubble. There are hooks by the entrance and in the low ceiling for lanterns, though none are there now. The furniture appears to have been wooden benches and tables. There are also shards of crockery and bits of metal around. The rough-hewn walls are slick with moisture that runs down from the ceiling, and that has smeared the now illegible scrawls on the walls.

This was once a break room for miners. There is nothing of value left here, as vagrants, vandals and other questionable creatures and people have stayed here over the years. The graffiti was painted by children, but in its smeared state could be mistaken for arcane symbols. In reality it calls the local lord's mother a kobold.



4. The Dark Mine Shaft

Read aloud:

The tunnel slopes downward in the form of broad steps to a 20' x 20' shaft that goes straight down into the darkness. Two rusty rings are set into the ceiling, one with a splintering wooden pulley, with a bit of frayed rope still hanging off. Water drips soundlessly, plummeting into the abyss with an echoing ploop below.

The mine does not really play into this Interlude. The easiest way to handle it is to have the lower mine levels be flooded. The surface of the water should be 60' down, and should go down at least another 20' to discourage exploration. Alternately, the DM may decide to attach this encounter to some to some other related or unrelated adventure involving a copper mine. The walls of the shaft are dangerously slick (DC 30).

Ending the Adventure

The Interlude basically ends when the encounter is finished, with either all the goblins fleeing or being soundly defeated. If the PCs retrieve the bag of ears, the town authorities will be very surprised to see the goblin ears, but will be obligated to pay the bounty.

Continuing the Adventure

Of course the nature of this interlude makes it so that the GM can expand upon it in many different ways. Below are some suggestions:

The Signet Ring: The signet ring with a fancy "S" (or whatever letter works for the campaign setting) belonged to a long lost member of a local noble family that will give a 100 gps reward for its return (a local pawn-broker would be able to identify it as such). This good deed could gain the party employment from this family. This could easily be linked with the "armour" plot point below.

The Studded Leather Armour: When and if the characters examine the armour the goblins are wearing they find it is of very fine quality (just short of masterwork). Where did these goblins get access to such fine armour? The GM could develop a conspiracy with another town or nation who is helping to arm the goblins in order to weaken their neighbour. The non-serious attitude towards the goblins that

locals have would mean that an attack by them would be unexpected and quite effective. Perhaps that is why so many young goblins are being initiated.

The Old Mine: What is in the old mine? Why was it abandoned? Why have the goblins not returned to their home? Perhaps it is merely flooded, or perhaps something more frightening and powerful live within. This could be a dropped clue for a future adventure when "fish-men" (kuo-tua? sahuagin?) begin to attack the town.

The Goblin Lair: The goblins that escape have a long march home. PCs could track them back to the old fort that they are now using as a lair, and find the goblins preparing for war.

Scaling the Adventure

Although intended as an introduction for low-level characters, there are some adjustments possible for more experienced parties:

- 3rd-level PCs: Double the number of "Cut" goblins and goblin warriors. Make Gar-Wog a 4th-level sorcerer.
- 5th-level PCs: Triple the number of "cut" goblins, add a worg for each of the goblin warriors and the sorcerer, who are resting in the entrance to the mine (or foraging around) the brush. Make Gar-Wog a 4th-level sorcerer.
- 7th-level PCs: Quadruple the number of "cut" goblins, and triple the number of warriors making them 3rd level; make Gar-wog a 6th-level sorcerer, with an assistant of the same level as Gar-wog is in the original adventure, add a warrior-leader who is 5th level, add a worg for each of the warriors, and one for Gar-wog and his assistant - give Gar-wog a heavy mace +2, and his leather armour masterwork.

